

Old Testament Survey

by

Dr. Douglas Stuart

Transcription

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Introduction to the Course

A. Introductory Comments

What we will do tonight is several things. First, I will lead us in prayer. Then I want to just explain a little bit about the way the course operates. I will be commenting for a while on the syllabus and then hope not to spend too much time on that and hope to get right into talking about Genesis and Exodus and about the Old Testament in general and try to give a feel for the way that we will operate from now on in this class and what its purposes are.

B. Prayer

Join me in prayer as we begin.

Father, we thank you that we are very privileged to be able to study your word with all the resources that are available in the modern day, with all of the relief from pressures that we have living in a place like this with all of the relative comforts, and yet we know that we are to be just as diligent as those who had to study it on the run and had to study it in days of great persecution and had to study it mainly by listening and trying to memorize. We appreciate all our advantages and pray that we will be nothing but grateful and all the more diligent. We thank you that you have given to each of us the potential to do your work on earth and included in that is passing along your truth to others so that they too can be shaped by it and guided by it. We pray then that everything we learn will not simply be a thing that we take pride in as an asset but everything we learn will be something we ask about the possibility of using for the benefit of others as we try to be loyal and obedient to you. And that we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

C. Structure of the Course

I will start to comment about things we do and hope that by the time that everybody gets a syllabus it will be all the clearer. We, first of all, will take a look at the Old Testament with a lot of emphasis on trying to read through it. I would like to encourage you, as much as is possible for you to do, actually to read the Bible. Now, I know sometimes you are going to have to basically skim rather than be able to read in detail, but a big part of the course is just trying to read the material; just get through it. You will notice that there are assignments all the time; read this, read that, read these books, read these chapters.

1. Content of Each Book

The theory is that a lot of what the course covers is really just gaining a sense of the content of the material. We will not spend a lot of time on what are called "Introductory" issues. Now the word *introductory* means something special in biblical studies. It means what might be called critical issues, debates about authorship, debates about dating, debates about structure and so on. It is not that we will not ever touch on these but you can deal with questions of "Introduction" at very great length. When was the Gospel of John written? Is it written by John the disciple or somebody else? What kind of Christology does it reflect as over against the other gospels and what does that tell you about its probable origin in time and origin in place and so on? Those are questions of introduction. We are going to talk much, much more about content. When you read the Bible what are you reading? What are the big themes? When somebody says to you, "How do you like the Book of Habakkuk?" What does your mind say, "The what!?" or does it say, "Yeah, Habakkuk, okay." I would like you, by the end of the course, to be able to say, "Well, Habakkuk is okay because But I really like Haggai because ..." One of the nicest

things that can happen is that you get to know at least something that is really accurate and useful about each book of the Old Testament and that is part of what we are trying to make you do the way we offer it.

2. Chronological Sweep of OT History

We also will hope to try to help you as we go along get a feel for some of the sweep of Old Testament history. Many of you will find as you minister that people do not have much of a sense of biblical history at all. I have done this and I challenge you to do it to your youth group or to your Sunday school class or to your Board of Deacons or to anybody. Take a few sheets of paper or 3 x 5 cards and just say, "Okay everybody, this is helpful to me in my study. Write down the date when King David lived." Look at the wild range of answers you get. Most people do not know. They do not know that he lived right around 1000 B.C and probably reigned from 1011 to 971. That is useful. It is something you can put things on. David is roughly a thousand years before Christ and it is a very interesting thing just to know that much and to realize a lot of biblical history in there between those two great figures. Or ask people, "Which came first, Abraham or Mephibosheth." It is just real interesting. They may not know who Mephibosheth is. It turns out he was a descendant of King Saul who was briefly considered in the line for the kingship, so in that sense even a potential rival to King David. But ask them that. Or ask them, "Tell me one fact about Zechariah." It is very interesting the answers you will get. He was the guy whose head was cut off in the movie by Mel Gibson. You will realize then, this will be insightful to you, you will realize these people are not stupid; they are good people and they love the Lord and they are trying to be his disciples but they do not know the facts. God put those facts in a book to help us see how he has worked in history and God knows that knowing that would be good for us; it would be helpful, it would make us more confident in Him, it would give us reassurance to live when times are tough as they often were for God's people. It will give us a sense of how He continues to work in our day as we extrapolate from the way He worked then. This has a lot of value to it. So we are going to try in this course to go chronologically. If you could just remember where we start and where we go week by week you will realize that we are moving through the books in a generally chronological order. We want to read the Bible, we want to appreciate the history of Israel, the basic passage of time and events in the Old Testament scope.

3. Particular Answers to Particular Questions

We will also try to bring to your knowledge a lot of particular answers to particular questions. The way we will do this is visible on page two and following of the syllabus because you will see that you get a lot of the exam questions in advance. It's a great method. Almost every seminary student is sufficiently obsessive-compulsive that if you give them an exam question in advance they will kill themselves to be sure they know the answer and in the process if you make the questions intelligent enough they will learn a great deal. That is what we have done in this case. We give you about one hundred and thirty questions and as we are going along in class a lot of these will be answered. As you are reading through the Old Testament a lot of them will be answered. As you do the assigned reading in the *New Bible Commentary* and so on, a lot of them will be answered. But some of them will still require you to look it up, to begin to use the tools like Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries and so on to find out the answers and that will be part of the process of just forcing you in a nice, friendly but definite forcing way to learn the material. It is a lot to cover. This is not a bonehead course. This is not some kind of remediation course for people who do not know much. It is a course that has a special purpose to give in one semester an overview of the entire Old Testament. I know as I look around the room that some of you are graduating seniors. You are not taking this because you have not studied a lot of Bible yet, you are taking it because you want the overview that a course like this provides, a way of integrating what you have been studying already in a variety of other Old Testament courses. Many of you are brand new to this seminary and to the Old Testament, and I would wager that some have probably not yet had a chance to read the Old Testament through before. This is a great chance to do it, and under pressure it is amazing how well many of us perform when we would not otherwise. Somebody just makes you do it and finally you do it. I really do hope it will be a nice and useful all your life orientation to the

Scriptures. I hope it will support what you already know and allow what you already know to be fitted into the big picture. Yet, I expect there will be some things I will say that no matter how much you study you might not have had a chance to think about or consider before. Let us hope that it meets everybody's need in some way.

D. Ministry Issues

I also will take the liberty to talk to you about ministry to some degree. Most of you, I know, are going to go into some kind of ministry, going to go into youth ministry or pastoral ministry or counseling ministry or something. You are here to prepare to serve the Lord and to help people. The ministry that is described in the New Testament is "The ministry of the Word." That is the terminology that is used. In some way or other the Bible is at the heart of all ministries that are real ministries. It is very hard to imagine saying, "I have a ministry but the Bible ain't in it." That just is not a Christian statement. Accordingly, I will from time-to-time just talk about how you can use this material. I have had the joy of pastoring now for a lot of years and hope that once in a while I have actually learned something that I can pass on to you. We will do that too. I will try to suggest from time-to-time ways in which you can actually employ what you are learning for the benefit of people; just suggest things, emphases, ways to do it that might just pay off for you.

E. Bible Study Tools

Many of your answers that you cannot find elsewhere you can find in something like the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE). I think it is the best, most useable of all of the multivolume Bible encyclopedias. But there are others that are excellent. The *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* (ZPBE) is excellent. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* is a massive thing that should be called encyclopedia but it is huge and it is excellent. There are a number of others. Almost in every case if you cannot find a name or a theme or a fact, any of the multivolume Bible encyclopedias will do the job. I have found over the years that students relate the best to and find the highest quality on average, not necessarily in every case but on average, in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, so it is a good one. Many of you will find that just one of the simple one-volume Bible encyclopedias, InterVarsity has a real good one, *The New Bible Dictionary* (one-volume Bible dictionary), it might have eighty percent of what you are looking for.

Genesis

I. Orienting Data for Genesis

Let us begin to talk about the material that we deal with in today's class, mostly Genesis, but we will start in on some aspects of Exodus as well. Let me do two things at once. What I will do is I will talk about Genesis a little bit and then I will talk about the Old Testament as a whole in some cases also. I begin with this overhead projection titled "Orienting Data for Genesis." This is an attempt just to be simple in summarizing what we've got.

A. Content

If somebody says to you, "Well, what is in Genesis?" You hopefully would eventually be able to say, "The origins of the world, humanity, and Israel." If you get that, boy are you saying a lot. Origins, very big theme. How did everything start? Where did everything come from? The origins of what exists in our world, certainly that is the first part. But then it is not going to deal only with that, sort of the physical world, but it deals with the origins of humanity. Where did human beings come from? How did they get organized into human society? What are human beings like? Where did sin come from? Those are all things that relate to our world and to humanity as it now stands because humanity is a corrupt thing. Human beings are imperfect, not perfect; impure, not pure; sinful, not sinless. So when we talk about humanity we are talking about the way humanity is not just who made man. Finally, the origins of Israel actually occupy more space in the book of Genesis than anything else. From the story of Abraham on in chapter 12, the big picture of Genesis is about the origins of Israel, God's people.

B. Human author

Having said that, Moses is the author. There are many things you can read about this. I believe it is true and will talk about it this way, but you may know that there are people who doubt that. Of course, you can find people who doubt anything. You could probably find six percent of the American population believe that Frank Sinatra never existed. It is amazing what people will answer on those surveys. "You are an Evangelical Christian, you are born again, you believe in reincarnation, right? O yeah, that's right, sure I do." You can almost trick people into saying things. So there is a debate on anything, but we are taking the approach in this class that good arguments can be and should be made for Moses as the author of the entire Pentateuch. That is what it claims and I think it is very defensible.

C. Date of Composition

But, he did not live during any of the time described in the book of Genesis; he comes after it. So of course he is a historian and he is putting the book together on the basis of a structure that we will talk about using sources and records from before his time as God leads him to do that. When he wrote the book, I think it is more likely to be around 1400 B.C. but there are some difficult chronology issues related to when Moses lived, when the Israelites came out of Egypt. You can read about those in the New Bible Commentary. You can also read about it in the New Bible Dictionary or any Bible dictionary under the title "Exodus" and it will describe for you what the challenges are. We just do not know as much about chronology prior to about 1000 B.C. as we would like and there are really many debates and mysteries about how it all fits together. I will take the date 1400, the so called "early chronology," for which I think there are some advantages but that could be wrong; it could end up being 1220. It is actually that much of a difference in when Moses would have lived and written this. But the presumption is that he wrote it during the time that the Israelites were in the wilderness to help the new nation, the nation that had just come about at Mount Sinai. All these people did not know much about their own past or many of them had joined the Israelites during the exodus. The Israelites were not a ethically unified people.

Exodus 12 tells us that large numbers of other ethnic groups joined the Israelites when they left Egypt and headed for Mount Sinai. So a lot of those people said, “Who’s Abraham? Who’s Isaac? Noah?” They did not know anything. So they are learning from Genesis how it all happened because their own religious background did not tell them any of that and so he puts it together for their benefit. If you are interested, one of our faculty members, Professor Garrett, wrote a fabulous book called *Rethinking Genesis* and it is a very fine analysis of how and why Moses wrote the book. It is really good, *Rethinking Genesis* by Duane Garrett.

D. Historical Coverage

The coverage of this book is, of course, creation through the death of Joseph. I say “of course creation,” you would not necessarily say “of course through the death of Joseph,” that happens to be what it is. Joseph is probably the last of the “patriarchs” that is the immediate family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So that is the span that the book covers.

E. Emphases

With regard to emphases, here is a list. These are great things. Think about preaching the book of Genesis. Let us say that sooner or later, some of you as I look around I know are pastors, I know you preach regularly, but let us say you wanted to preach the book of Genesis sooner or later. Think of these great things:

1. Think of preaching on God’s nature. You can do that out of Genesis, a lot of material there. God’s purposes for the world, a lot of it is there. We will talk about some of those tonight.

2. The reasons why humans exist. That ought to keep people’s attention for twenty minutes or so, at least.

3. The first divine covenants. A lot of people are clueless about covenants and what they mean and why. That is a term they do not even know. But it is just a rich concept; it is wonderful. It is what one scholar described recently in a very impressive book as “extended kinship.” A covenant is a way of making people act like they are part of a family. The concept of a covenant very much related to the idea of the way that maybe a father in a family makes sure that he is good to that family and in return expects that family to be obedient to his wise and proper direction. That kind of thing, God functioning that way.

4. The nature of sin. A lot of people are clueless about sin. We live in an age in which a lot of people think that is a funny notion, weird. You can watch twelve hours of TV in a row and nobody will say, “That was a sinful action, shame on you!” An awful lot of people it is just nowhere in their consciousness. Unless people are alert to it, how in the world are they going to repent of their sins and get saved? It is a good thing for people to get.

The perpetual corruption of human society. We live in a world that has fooled us into thinking that people are basically good and they have just been manipulated. But if you just take away the manipulating factors they will all turn out to be great. This is sort of a naive, liberal, humanitarian, humanistic approach and zillions of people think that way.

God’s intolerance of sin. There is no thought that sin is so widespread because God does not mind it. So why in the world can it happen and what does he do about it and how does this work in our world today?

God’s choice of a people, which is a big theme of Scripture. There is always a people and election is basically corporate. When the Scripture speaks of election there are a couple of places which debatably talk about individual election but all the time talking about God’s chosen people. So the people is primarily the elect and individuals are elect in as much as they relate to the people. An interesting concept that not many people have even heard about, but it is a very Biblical concept.

God’s great plan of redemption, which is really the beginning of the whole Bible story. In some ways you could say that the Bible is the story of redemption.

The fact that God works through sinful people. It is a wonderful, wonderful lesson from Genesis. You can see it everywhere else too, for that matter. In Genesis it is very vivid. If God accomplishes his purpose through people who lie, who cheat, who are sneaky, who are afraid to tell the truth and so they do not, who manipulate one another, who are afraid of the consequences of being honest and descent or afraid of the losses of being honest and descent and sometimes it is family members being manipulative and dishonest and so on, yet these are the people through whom God works. If you can show to your youth group, your class, your congregation that God knows how to do this, many people will suddenly say, "What, God can use me that I love to sneak looks at pornography?" or "I love this," or "I have had these thoughts," or "I have this background," or "I'm not very nice," or "I pretend to pray but I really don't like to do it," or whatever, and you can get the point across to them, yes, God knows how to work through you to accomplish his purposes. That is a great thing for people to get a concept of. An awful lot of people say, "In the Bible they have these hugely dedicated people, but I'm just not one of them. How in the world can I do anything for the Lord?" They would like to but they honestly do not believe that they are qualified. And if you say to them, "That's right, you too are not qualified so just watch what God will do." It is a wonderful thing, greatly encouraging, and one of the most wonderful themes of the book.

II. Outline of Genesis (Origin Stories)

Here is the way, in part at least, that Moses put the book of Genesis together.

A. We have here a structure of the book that has a prologue and then ten origin stories. So that is really the big overview that I want you to be sure to get. You just need to know that that is the structure. I have made it more detailed than you might need just to be able to prove as you even look at a little bit of this overhead that this is the way the thing really fits together. So what Moses did was to structure the book rather strictly and precisely and he says at ten different points, "This is the origin story of..." and then he tells you something. Now the first place he does that is 2:4 where he says, "This is the origin story of the heavens and the earth." In the King James it translates, "These are the generations of..." And that is a possible translation. It is a Hebrew word in the plural *toledoth* but it also can mean in the singular in English, "account". So the NIV says, "This is the account of..." You might say this is the story of; a story kind of gives you background. You might call it a background. This is the background of or this is the overview of. I prefer the term "origin story" to translate it. He gives a prologue and that prologue obviously must give some kind of introductory overview of things, and I will talk about how it does and then he gives ten origin stories.

B. The first one is "the heavens and the earth" and that includes the Garden of Eden and the first human family.

C. Then Adam.

D. Then Noah.

E. Then Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

F. Then Shem specifically meaning that the story narrows down. Shem is the ancestor of the Semites and within the Semites are the Israelites. So, of course, the focus is narrowing down to one particular people. So already by chapter 11 things narrow down.

G. They narrow down even more at 11:27 where you get the stories of Terah, Abraham's father. And, in fact, Terah is mentioned for a half a verse and then you get Abraham; it is really about Abraham, he is the focus of it. But in the ancient near eastern style you would always honor the ancestor and then even if it is your story it would be the story of your father's son or whatever. So it is called that of Terah but really the focus is on Abraham not on Terah by any means.

H. Then Ishmael and his twelve sons. Notice that the guy Ishmael had twelve sons, very interesting relative to the story. The Bible does not give a lot of detail about the Ishmaelites but it certainly describes them as also a great people, also to have numbers like the sand on the seashore, etc., and the Ishmaelites are who today? Arabs. This is a promise to the great Arab people that they too will have God's blessing and protection. Will they be his covenant people? No, that is not so. It is not that he hates them or rejects them or something, they are the descendants of Abraham and a special people all by themselves and very worthy of love and respect and also evangelism as everybody who you love and respect is.

I. Origin stories of Isaac.

J. Then of Esau. And again that is kind of a side shoot so you see that God does not just love and care about only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he also cares about Ishmael and Esau and so on; they are important to him. Already in Genesis you see the emphasis of God's concern for all peoples and races. His election of a people is not an election of favor so that he only likes Israelites and hates everybody else. It is a choice to give them a job assignment to do something for him through whom eventually the whole world will be blessed.

K. Finally, the biggest chunk of all, the origin stories of Jacob, which focus more on Joseph than anybody else.

Again, you can find this list in a lot of places, it is not mysterious or complicated to get at, but that is the way Moses put the book together. It is not the kind of thing that everybody would notice as they would read along, but once you tell somebody, "Hey, just look for, when it says, 'This is the account of ...' or 'Here are the stories of...' or whatever, just look for it." Once they know to look for it they will see the structure. Once they see the structure some of the points made by the structure will come out. The way you put a thing together is part of the emphasis, part of the message. So what Moses has done is to show that God created the world, then he created humanity, then he created a people for himself, and the process of how that happens is covered by ten individual story blocks that get down to where the Israelites are a people of God and are in Egypt and are ready to become an actual nation with their own special covenant and so on. That is the way the book of Genesis operates.

Let me then from this point start narrowing down on what we have in Genesis 1 in particular. That is part of the prologue. This is not the entire prologue; this is certainly a part of it. In this course we do a lot of sampling. How could it ever be that I would be able to talk about every chapter; there is not the time for it. This is an overview. But in order to help you appreciate the material I will pick and choose particular things, particular passages, particular problem issues, sometimes little detail things that you might say are kind of narrow details compared to the big picture. I do that in order that I might give you a feel for how to interpret and use material and so on or things that I just think that you probably will not pick up by doing the reading. If I know that you will pick up lots of good things from the reading but that there would be some things you would not pick up from the reading; I will just sort of fill in some of those spots or things that I think you might not notice. There are a lot of different reasons for picking and choosing what I have chosen to deal with.

III. Genesis 1: Creation Story Structure

In the creation story in Genesis 1 there does appear to be also a very strong structure that Moses has chosen to employ. When we appreciate this structure we actually get some insight into how this story should be employed. It is very easy to think that it must be a series of six steps, six stages, that are described in the six days of creation. Stages one, two, three, four, five, and six; six at the end, one at the beginning. And that then there is stage seven which is the day of rest and that is the pattern. In fact, that does not appear to be the pattern. It appears to be rather that there are three stages and then a day of rest and it is a lot more "stylized" than it is what we would call incremental. This is important for usage because many people get hung up right away on the question of whether Genesis can be squared with what science tells us. Now any of you who majored in science know that science tells you a whole bunch of things depending on who is doing the telling. All kinds of people

debating all kinds of basic things in science all the time. But there are people who say, "Science is my criterion for whether or not Genesis is true." I hope in the next few minutes just to talk about what Genesis is saying, what it is asserting, how it is put together in a way that may be of some use with regard to answering the question do science and Genesis line up properly.

A. First of all if you will look at the way the days correspond; one and four, two and five, and three and six. Let me just describe that. In day one in Genesis we have the following described for us. "Let there be light, there was light. The light was separated day from night and there was evening and morning, day one." Okay, now you might think everything after that follows along at some length but then if you actually go to verse 14 you see that it is going back to pick up what was said about day one. It is day four but it goes back and it says, "God said let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night." That is almost what he said before. "Let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days, let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth. It was so. God made two great lights," in other words the sun and the moon, "and God saw that it was good and there was evening and morning the fourth day." This starts the pattern, at least this is the first complete cycle of the pattern, day one and day four; basic creation of light and the separation of light from darkness, more specifically identification of what that light is and where it comes from. That is the way it works. Day four seems to be presumptive. It seems to be going back and just fleshing out the details of how that creation, described more briefly and sort of in a more overview manner in day one, actually took place.

B. Without spending lots of time on this you can do this with day two and you can see how it is that the skies and the seas get created and therefore the birds and the water animals.

C. And then day three land and plant life and you will see how it is that the land animals eat the plant life and the humans are over the whole shebang. It is not a description of six discrete stages; it is really three major stages in six days suggesting that what Moses was trying to do was two things at once. He was trying to say that God created everything and broadly speaking here is what he did and how, as time went by, he fit everything in his basic framework of light and darkness and water and sky and land and plants and so on.

D. Then on the seventh day he rested. Moses makes a big point about that as he is inspired by God to do it. We know, and Moses knew, that God probably would not get exhausted. Instead, God does something by example. We have this in the New Testament. John the Baptist says to Jesus, "You don't need to be baptized, I know that," and Jesus says, "I know it too," I am paraphrasing. But he does, he says, "Nevertheless," which is the equivalent of I know it too, "we have got to fulfill all righteousness. I want my people to follow what I have done. They are going to be baptized just as I am baptized." This is very important because it is the symbol of confessing your sin and being forgiven for your sins and understanding that you should not have done it and that you need forgiveness. "They are going to follow me in death, in a certain sense as well, I am going to die for them, however, so that the second death won't apply and they are going to follow me in resurrection." So he is our leader in a lot of the big events of life, conversion and so on, and we need to appreciate that. It is not unusual that people do things that they do not need to do for our benefit. God does it; rest as a basic example for all his people and even for animals. Later on in the law when it talks about the Sabbath it says "Do not make your animals work." Don't say "I don't work but my animals will." No, give everything a break, everything needs rest, everything cannot work constantly. So what Moses has done is something really quite nice. He said I will give you an overview, highly stylized, not very, what we might call, scientific; we would say it's more like a prose poem or something. Highly stylized of the way it all worked and I will emphasize that God did it; that is the first thing I will emphasize. Second, I will emphasize that he liked it; it was not a screw-up. That is important. We should appreciate that creation is the way God wanted it to be. He says it was good, he keeps saying it is good. Then I will use a week formula. I will say about each day evening and morning, day, one, day two, day three and so on. That is the way the Israelites counted days. They concluded that when the sun was going down it must be the end of one day; therefore, sunset must represent the beginning of another. Other people have concluded other things. Other cultures have said the day begins when the sun rises. We do another thing, we say let's begin the day in the middle of the night; we

actually do that because it is the direct opposite of high noon, that is how we figure it. It is all just somebody's decision. What Moses does then is to get you thinking in a pattern of a daily life; the evening comes and the morning comes and that is a day and so on. Every sunset you look back and say that was another day and that went by and you think of these six times over while you are also telling the creation story and then you say, "Even God rested, and by gum if God rested shouldn't we?" Because one of the most basic features of this creation story is that God made the Sabbath for the benefit of human beings. The Sabbath is a big theme in Scripture and I would encourage you to preach it and teach it when you preach Genesis. There is in the Evangelical world a considerable group of people who do not get either any Sabbath to speak of or do not get much of a Sabbath and they are called "women." In many Evangelical churches you have mothers and spouses; women, who basically are working seven days a week. They are doing on Sunday as much or more than they had to do during the week. During the week it might have been very easy for them to get one kid to school at this time, another kid at that time and so on but they got to get them all at the same time to Sunday school and they have to be dressed extra-special and they have got to have a lunch ready for people that get invited over and that is a bigger deal than ever. That is a lot harder than sending off a kid with another bologna and cheese sandwich. There may be other kinds of things that are far more difficult on Sunday than the rest of the week and they will be working seven days a week. So I say to all of you who are married, will be married, might get married, whatever, especially if you are male, just remember do not take a Sabbath yourself and say, "Boy am I honoring the Lord," and not ask the question, "How can I be sure that my wife gets the same equivalent time off?" God wants everybody to have a break. It is a very important teaching of Scripture. I had a former advisee who is now in ministry tell me just today that, this was now about twenty years ago but he happened to come by and drop by my office and he told me, "You know," he said, "you gave me some of the greatest advice twenty years ago." I said, "I did? What?" I had forgotten all about it. He said he would come by. I believe this is true though I really have forgotten it. He was talking about how discouraged and depressed he was and I just asked him, trying to find out why. He was working an evening job and a day job and trying to study and he was married with a couple of children and he had all these demands on him and he was trying to pastor also on the side and everything. He said I told him, it sounds very wise now that I hear it twenty years later, "You can do any of those things but you can't do all of them." So he quit one of his jobs and he said it gave him time and his depression lifted and so on. So he was praising me how brilliant I was. I was not brilliant; I was just following what the Scripture says, nobody should work all the time, nobody. And you should not think that you can do it. Can pastors get trapped into this? The answer is yes because there is always some need, there is always a need, there is always somebody else you can witness to or spend time with. There is always somebody else in the hospital or just out of the hospital. There is always that group of people who are suffering and you could make one more visit again tonight. Would they appreciate it? They would love it if you came by. It would mean the world to them, all the different shut-ins and so on. You can end up not only neglecting your family and making them resentful but you can also end up just working around the clock all the time in ministry. And God says to you, "I want you to have a day off." So one of the challenges of ministry is to be able to hold people off. Most of them do not know what your day off is. If your day off is Monday they do not know it, their day off is not Monday, they never heard of anybody with a day off on Monday. Who would do that? So they feel free to call you on a Monday and say, "So and so just went into the hospital; I know you will want to go over there," or whatever. You have to be able to say, "Aw, I am totally tied up but I think I can get there first thing tomorrow." You have to say that. This is advice that you want to listen to. Let's say that you have been doing a lot of things and tonight is your night to watch television with the kids and eat popcorn and you promised them that and you get a call. Mary so and so is dying, she is dying and they need you there. You need to be able to say, "This is awful, I am totally tied up with a very, very important thing but I think I can get free by eleven. Let me pray with you right now over the phone and I will be there just as soon as I can after eleven, meaning you will get the kids to bed, everything will be settled, you will finish the popcorn and then you will go. You have to do that because God says you need a day of rest. He puts it right in the Genesis story right in the beginning and says "I did it and I don't need to rest." It really is important advice. What Moses has done is these things all together, he packaged it all together and he said, "Yes, God created everything and he created it just the way he wanted it, no screw-up, no foul up, he did it and it is the way

it should be.” Now that is in contrast to many creation stories floating around in his day where many gods and goddesses created and all things were born into existence and the mother goddess bore the moon and bore the sun and bore the earth and they grew up and became shapes and all kinds of myths. So Moses says, “No, God did it, it is separate from him, it is anti-pantheistic, it is all his creation, he looked at it and said it is good, it is the way I want it to be but at the same time he is teaching us that his great work of creation functions as an example to us that we all need to rest. So let’s have nobody who tries to honor God not give himself a day of rest, his family a day of rest and all who work for him a day of rest and even the animals a day rest. Important teaching. It makes almost no sense today to many people, not any sense at all of a Sabbath. Why would you do that? If you can work eighty hours a week and make more money and you put it into a 401K plan, that is great. Lots of Christians, on a basic feature of the Ten Commandments and of creation, are just off somewhere in the distance.

IV. Man Created in the Image of God

We then come in that same story, Genesis 1, to this very interesting statement in verse 27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” It is real clear that men and women are parallel, created in God’s image. What does this mean?

A. There are some options.

1. One option is we look like God. If you are in the image of God that means that in some way you look like him. There are references in the Bible to God having arms, his great mighty arm, you could argue that, or swearing with uplifted hands to honor his promises or the eyes of God being on everything. There are references to the earth being his footstool so he must have feet. Is that what it means? I would suggest, no, it really is not the point.

2. There is another way that people tend to think of it, that we in effect by being especially rational beings, you can do algebra a lot better than a hamster; you are real rational. That is the reflection— that is really what it is. You are a person with intelligence and reasoning power and all of that, interrelationships of important kinds, that is the way we reflect God. That is what it means to be in his image. And other people have tried different things.

3. Let me suggest to you that it actually means this: We represent God and are supposed to do his will.

B. I want to help you see something. The word that is used in the Hebrew for this language, “He made man in his own image,” is this word in Hebrew, *tselem*. This word is a standard word in Hebrew and Aramaic and other Semitic languages, for that matter, because they all have a reflex of it, for “idol” — standard word for idol. Thus when you see this in the Hebrew you could actually translate it if you wanted to, “God created man as his idol.” Why would it say that? What in the world could possibly be meant by that kind of wording? Let me suggest what is going on; it will help you understand idolatry on the one hand and help you understand what it means to be in God’s image on the other. In the ancient world people did understand the concept of representation. This morning I talked with my mom on the phone. Now, what I really did was make airwaves with my mouth into a mechanism and that mechanism translated those into certain kinds of signals and my mom did the same thing in her telephone and it came back as airwaves out of a device into my ear. That does not bother me. I could say I talked with my mother; I talked to my mother even though I was talking with a representation of her voice created by a device. People understood that basic concept. They knew that if you drew a picture of something in a certain sense it captures some of the essence. They knew if you mention somebody’s name, bingo, the person comes to mind; you visualize the person. They understood the concept of representation of something. The world quickly became pagan, of course, right after Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, secular humanism set right in and it got worse and people began going to movies and stuff like that and playing cards. No, I am just kidding. Certainly any form of sin, major and minor started, it was terrible. You read a lot about the degeneration of humanity in the book of Genesis. One of the things that happened very, very early on is that people began using

this concept of the fact that an image represents something for idolatry. They began saying there must be lots of gods and goddesses. This is an easy assumption to make that there would not be only one, that there might be many. If we want to have some sense of communication with them we better get a device that represents them and what better thing to do than to make something that looks like, in some way, what we think that god or goddess looks like. People thus made up a religion and based it on idolatry. By Moses' day the concept of idol, that is in Hebrew *tselem*, everybody knew, everybody in the whole culture knew it. It is a corruption of what the original plan of God was as announced here. But God inspires Moses to be sure to get it across in that language. So I am not saying that it did not happen this way, it certainly did happen this way. I am just saying that what God chose was to inspire language that everybody would instantly understand. We will have man be our idol. What is that? The *tselem* is the thing that you use to represent you or the thing that somebody else uses to represent you. If you are a god or goddess people use this statue to represent you to them. If you are a person who wants to worship the god so and so and you do not have a statue of him, you feel kind of like you cannot do it real well. So the idol is conceived to be a device for making that god or goddess present in your midst so that you can have some sense of contact with them. You might say, "Well, that is a dumb thing," but you know hundreds of millions of people still worship idols around the world today. They do not think it is a dumb thing. It is the most natural thing to them, they are real used to it. In the ancient world everybody did, everybody practiced idolatry. So this made sense to say it this way. What really should have happened, what the original intention was, is that there would be no representation of God on earth in any way. No pictures, no nothing except for us. We are his representatives on earth. Not because we look like him, that if you could see God you would say, "I like his cheekbones, they are kind of nice." Not that at all but rather that we stand in his place. What we are supposed to do is treat this world and relate to it just as he would do. That is basic creation theology and that is what he goes on to say. "Let them fill the earth, let them have dominion over all the animals that are in it, let them till the garden and let them work the soil. I give all of this to the humans to do." It is a basic theological point. In the New Testament we have the Lord's Prayer. What does Jesus say? "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are God's representatives to make that happen and that is why he created man. He created human beings to do his will on earth. So it is a job assignment. To be in the image of God is essentially an assignment rather than something that is of our essence. It does not relate to our intelligence per say. Does it have a connection? Sure, you have to be intelligent to do it and all that. It really is not appearance; it is not really the way our minds work or something. It is a job assignment. That is really what the Hebrew is emphasizing. Every human being has great worth and is very precious because every human being is supposed to be a representative of God on earth. That is your purpose in life. You do not have to go further than Genesis 1 to answer the question, "What am I doing here?" If you tell people that, for many of them it will turn a light bulb on. They will suddenly see the dignity of who they are and they will suddenly say, "Wait a minute, my life has purpose. I get it. I am supposed to accomplish on earth what God wants just as in heaven, what he wants is always accomplished." People do not say, "I'm not sure I can get to that, God." No. Not in heaven. You do not get that. No such reaction. Is that clear, as we say in Boston?

V. The Fall

A. Let me add an interesting phenomenon. Right away we get the story of Adam and Eve and the temptation in the garden so it is obvious that Satan was already here. From this and many other places in Scripture it is pretty clear that you can say the following: God chose to create human beings on the very planet to which he had already previously banished Satan. There is no mystery there. Satan does not show up and God said, "I forgot to put a Satan barrier up." No. It is not that at all. Satan was already here. I think that is the pretty clear teaching of Scripture. He was already around, already knew the territory. That is significant. We were placed on a planet that is Satan's home territory. Jesus in John 12 calls him the *archon*, the ruler of this world. Jesus says that about Satan. This is the guy that runs the world and that is how he describes Satan. There is a lot in Scripture about the importance of the suppression of Satan, the binding of Satan, the opposition that Satan can give because he would

of course not like anybody encroaching on his territory but the ultimate victory of Christ will be that Satan will be destroyed and this world transformed into a new heaven and a new earth. From the beginning there was a great challenge. Humans were not in an easy place. I think it is great to give people a clear understanding that they, from the beginning, have got to have God's help because otherwise you are going to be ruined by Satan. He knows how to handle you. He has been around longer. He knows just what to do with you so you desperately need help. You cannot avoid sin by good will, good cheer, and hard effort. It is just not that easy. That is an important thing to get. The fall did not eliminate job assignment, did not eliminate the fact that it is shared by male and female, etc. The fall demonstrated an interruption of the tendency to fulfill the job assignment. We still have the image of God, that is our job and that is what we are put here for and we have the ability to do it, technically. We lack the ability because our sinful nature prevents us from it. That is what I think the fall introduces. The imperfection of fulfillment of the image, but it does not eradicate the image. What God did was to banish Satan to a planet that he created and liked. That means that there is nothing, per say, wrong with the planet. What would you infer from that? Some people would say, "There are earthquakes, it is a bad planet." I would say no. You cannot say that Scripturally. You cannot say, "Hey, there is more rainfall in Massachusetts than there is in Mexico. What a screw-up." No. The way the planet is, is by design and God likes it. But he did then put here not only Satan and quite a number of angels who followed Satan but then thereafter put here humans. There was always, from the beginning, the possibility of serious temptation and trouble. Those are realities that people should face. The more you know what the facts are the better you are able to respond to them. That is how I would put it as a way of thinking about it. There is nothing wrong with the planet per say. The planet, however, is in futility. Paul says, "God has placed as a result of the fall all nature in futility." So the planet now has been what it could be is not what it is by reason of sin. But, not that what it is in essence is somehow a mistake. No, it is the way it should be. When it gets transformed into a new heaven and a new earth it will be fine. I would not say that you can therefore infer that the only way God will then work is through humans—the only way, but I think you can infer that a huge amount of what he does he will do through people. If the gospel is going to be heard in your neighborhood chances are the Holy Spirit will not go door-to-door saying, "Pssst, you ought to believe." It will be people that the Holy Spirit moves to do it. So God works through people. Actually Satan does this too. Satan and his angels work through people also. Remember, Satan is finite. He cannot be everywhere tempting everybody at every moment. So are the number of fallen angels finite. That is why the Bible says resist the devil and he will flee from you. He has intelligence enough to say, "I'm wasting my time on this person, I have been here eight minutes trying to get this person to do something and it is not working. It is a total waste of my time. I could be tempting somebody else and get somewhere." What does Satan do? Satan tries to build a general corruption in society so that the culture will trap us. That is a very important theme of Scripture. John calls it "the world", the *kosmos*. The world traps you into opposing God. We are putting a lot of time in the beginning of Genesis, I know that, but it is well worth it. The major theological themes of the Bible are all found in one way or another in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. There are people who have taught theology courses from Genesis 1 to 11. You can do it. We are putting a little bit of heavy emphasis on it. Here is another one that I think is just useful for you to be alerted to.

B. In Genesis 2:17 where you have the Garden of Eden story and God's prohibition he says, "You can eat of any tree you want but you must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Now, I have a question. Why wouldn't he want them to eat of that tree most of all? Wouldn't God want them to know all about good and evil? Isn't that just the right tree to eat from? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil—know what is good, know what is bad, be able to choose between them, right? Actually it is misleading. Here is the situation. The knowledge of good and evil is what is called a "merism". Let me give you some examples very quickly. This is just to give you a feel for it, you do not have to memorize these or copy them all down. In the Bible we really have a lot of merisms. A merism is an expression of totality by the mention of polarity. You mention some opposites and it implies everything in between. For example, the west and the east are used as merisms. Heaven and hell, if I ascend to heaven there you are, if I go to Sheol there you are. Does that mean that God is only at the two extremes? No, he is everywhere, that is the point. Near and far are used as

merisms. “Peace to the far and peace to the near,” says the Lord. In other words peace to everybody. More examples of merisms— “going out and coming in” is a fairly common merism. “The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in,” meaning the Lord will take care of everything in your life. Then “good and evil” actually a very common merism. It means “any kind of thing” or it means “everything”. Their idols cannot speak, cannot walk, cannot do evil, cannot do good, meaning they just cannot do anything. The knowledge of good and evil is a way of saying in Hebrew “all knowledge, knowledge of everything” and that is what God does not want people to know. If you read the story, you see that is what Satan says. He says, “Hey, he knows you will become like gods knowing everything. That is what he is trying to keep from you. Don’t you want to know everything?” Knowing everything sounds interesting. And they do and after the fall God says, he is speaking again in heaven as he often does in many places in Scripture not just Genesis, “Look they have become like one of us, they know good and evil, they know everything.” Does that mean that they actually know everything? You say, “Alright, immediately draw me a graph for the following equation.” No, it takes time to know that. The idea is that we now have more knowledge than we can morally handle. That is the point of what is emphasized here in this story.

C. Part of the human dilemma as a consequence of the fall is that humans have enormous knowledge of how to do bad things as well as how to do good things. The same human being that knows how to create a computer and all the bandwidth that they use for all the good communication purposes so you can get e-mail from your cousin in Mongolia also has provided a way for a vast increase in the dissemination of pornography in our age. The same skill that uses atomic energy for good makes weapons out of it. The same skill that does anything can be used for bad. Human beings, unlike hamsters and June bugs, have enormous capacity for choices; taking skills that they could use and should use for good and employing them for evil. That is part of the human dilemma. We are in trouble because we are so good at doing bad. That is, I think, the message that you are supposed to get out of this whole story about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is a second question raised by this. How come they did not die? It says, “the day they eat thereof they shall surely die,” but they did not. The answer is they did in this sense, mortality came into the picture. They really did die in the sense of losing immortality, losing the ability to continue to live. They are thrown out of the garden; they cannot eat the tree of life and continue to live. That is restored in the book of Revelation but it is gone for them at this point. Thus, another effect of the fall is that we live with mortality. This makes an enormous difference to people. They are all living with the awareness that death is coming for sure. It affects the way people plan and think and live. You get all these midlife crises. You get everything else under the sun because people are worried about how their life is ebbing away and so on and they cannot any longer do jump shots or whatever they were good at when they were seventeen. But far more than that it is a reality that you just have to face, quite honestly, you cannot live forever. Thus, if you want to keep living there has to be a rescue, there just has to be, because now you have become mortal. Those two themes are very big themes in terms of consequences of the fall.

Themes in Genesis

I would like to make some comments about other themes that we find in Genesis, just for a few minutes. Now remember, I am counting on you to read the material in the Bible itself with as much time as you can give to it. I know we are all pressed for time but within whatever time frame you have got, to read the secondary literature that is assigned for you and so on. If you come to the class saying, "Gee, he didn't say much about Genesis 40 to 50," or something. I do not have any apologies for that at all, it was absolutely purposeful. There are some things I think you are more likely to be able to get by reading on your own and some things I would like to just be sure you hear and it will not be balanced; it is not a balanced presentation that I give at all in class. It is very selective, but it does try to touch upon big themes that we will try to tie together in various ways. So that is certainly the method that is going on.

I. Genesis 2:18

I would also like to comment on Genesis 2:18 just very quickly because we have in that statement an important truth that not everybody has been able to see easily. "The Lord God said it is not good for the man to be alone." You could translate that "Adam to be alone;" you could also translate "the human to be alone" or "men in general to be alone."

A. "I will make a helper suitable for him." I do not think it means suitable. That is the NIV. Some people have been puzzled for many years by the old King James wording, "I will make an help meet for him." This is "meet" in the old sense of the English, "appropriate." "Meet," right for him and "help." So it gets mutated into a "helpmeet." But helpmeet sounds like something you might buy at a grocery store, some brand name or something. So they translated it to helpmate, which does not make any sense; that is what it says.

B. Here is what it says as well as I can understand it and pass it on to you. Just because I say it does not prove it, but I am trying to share with you what I think is so. It says, "An *Ezer*," and I know some in this class know the Hebrew so I am writing it first in the Hebrew and then *kenegedo*. It is from *neged* and *keneged* meaning "corresponding to." What God says is, "I'll make a help." We could say helper but it really is not helper. In the Hebrew it is actually "a help" in other words "a source of help" is the fullest way to say it, "corresponding to him." I think the emphasis on "suitable" is not right.

C. If you study carefully the meaning of that Hebrew preposition *keneged*. It means really the "mirror image" of something, "corresponding to." In fact, by medieval Hebrew times it came to mean the exact opposite of something. You know the mirror image in the sense of exact opposite. So, many rabbis wrote long treatises on how women were the exact opposite of men. That is medieval Hebrew; it actually is a mutation of it. But it does tend to have this sense of the mirror image, just the same as, exactly corresponding to. You have here a very important statement about the relationship of men and women, and I will hardly surprise any of you who heard me speak on this topic before by saying that I really think many of the ideas that drive some people to think that women should not have a ministry or should not have some kinds of ministries or are unqualified to be ordained or whatever, are absolutely well-intentioned but based on misunderstandings of what the Scripture actually teaches. In this particular case it is one small part of a big picture about the question of women in ministry, but I am absolutely convinced that there is absolutely nothing anywhere in Scripture that would disqualify women from any ministry that exists. I do not think it is so. In particular this passage is not just talking about somebody who will help him that is suitable to help him because that can sound even like a '54 Ford pickup; suitable and it will help him. No, this is much more. This is a source of help that is his mirror image—that corresponds to him. You have really a way of saying here, "I am going to pair up these human beings and I am going to put them on an equal basis with each

other.” I think it is even mutual. I think you could infer that. Though it does not say it here. It does not say, “And they will help each other” but you have a help corresponding to this certainly in inference that they would help each other in various ways.

D. Then to illustrate this or emphasize it or drive the point home God creates woman from Adam himself. So Eve comes right from Adam. She gets his very essence and he says to her when he sees her after he says, “Wooo! Hey, all right!” Then he says, “This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. I am going to call her woman,” *ishah* Hebrew just a feminine of the Hebrew *ish* “because she was taken from man.” It is all correspondence, equality language. For what that is worth, I think it is worth mentioning.

II. Genesis 6:1-3

I also want to talk about Genesis 6:1-3 which is a funny little passage and I will make a couple of comments on it. Sometimes these comments I will make and I really will not prove it to you. I will just say to you here is my suggestion as to how it is to be interpreted. I may give you a couple of lines of reasoning. Therefore, obviously, you are free to disagree. I hope that what it does is at least make you aware of what I think a good interpretation is and then at least if you have never heard of that interpretation there will be some usefulness for you in being aware of it as you search the commentaries and the articles and so on to study more fully. We cannot study everything fully in a class like this, it is not the nature, but I can do some things that are like this, kind of whetting your appetite for what you could find if you look through it. In the case of the flood story it starts off with a story about the way the earth is corrupted. It says, Genesis 6:1, “When people began to increase in number on earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they married any of them they chose.”

A. If you will take any concordance, go to any computer concordance, book concordance and just look up that expression “Sons of God” you will find that it normally means “angels.” It is a standard term for angels, both in Hebrew and Aramaic. In Hebrew *bene-elohim* “sons of God” or *bene-el* used all the times in the Psalms for that. I think this is saying angels saw human women and married any of them that they chose. How could this be? Well, you have in effect, what is it where an angel can function like a human? It is what we call demon possession in our day or in the New Testament. You have that going on back then and the earth gets corrupted by it and God does not like it so he says, “Look, this represents a problem and so my Spirit will not remain in man forever.” Some translations say “contend with” but it can be translated “remain in,” and “I am going to limit his time on the earth.” Then it says, “The Nephilim,” the Nephilim are a race of unusual people, “on the earth in those days when the sons of God went into the daughters of men and had children by them. They were heroes of old, men of renown.” And then it says, “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness had become.”

B. I would say to you, suggest to you that Genesis 6:1-3 is just a little instance, a little short vignette to give you a feel for the way that Satan’s influence was manifest in all kinds of ways. It is just a sample. It actually skewed things in various ways that caused God to say, “I’ve got to do something about this wickedness.”

C. Then general statements about wickedness are also given and that precedes and leads up to the flood story, which is a story both of judgment and of deliverance. The New Testament makes much of the flood story because the flood story really is a kind of a model for the way God works in general. God will not tolerate evil forever and so eventually God is going to eliminate all evil and preserve the good. That is what we look for in a final judgment. The flood story is an early sampling of the ultimate plan of final judgment so that God’s ultimate plan is to have a universe that is free from sin and free from any wickedness or harm or sadness, etc. But, in the meantime, before that comes he shows from time-to-time in stories like this that he will not tolerate, ignore endlessly the kind of wickedness that this world represents especially as people end up doing the bidding of Satan. That is my purpose in giving that quickie overview.

III. Genesis 9:24

In 9:24 there is also just a little detail that most of you would not ever worry about.

A. Some of you have heard of the expression the “Curse of Ham.” Some years ago I was in seminary and I was teaching in downtown New Haven. They had a system there where public school kids could actually get out of school early and take religious classes. So I was teaching a class. Most of the kids were African-American kids, great kids and I enjoyed them very much in teaching them. But one girl said to me after a class, this was an African-American girl, she said, “Do you know that black people are under a curse?” I said, “Black people are not under a curse. Where did you get that?” She said, “I got it from my grandfather; he is a minister.” I said, “That is terrible, you shouldn’t be believing that. There is no curse.” “Oh yes,” she said, “it’s in the Bible.” “It is not so,” I said. “Yes,” she said. “My grandfather said it is the curse of Ham and God said, ‘Your face will be black and your nose will be flat.’” I said, “Where did you get this nonsense?” If it was alive and well in downtown New Haven some years ago, I just know that maybe some of you have heard it or maybe some of you will encounter people who have actually heard that nonsense. It is a terrible, awful, wild, weird, and discriminatory teaching and it makes no sense. It does not have any support in Scripture.

B. What you have in the curse that Noah gives is a curse for what Ham did to him because he “uncovered his nakedness” or “saw his father’s nakedness.” The tricky thing about that is how best to understand the translation. If you will look elsewhere, say in the book of Leviticus, in Leviticus 18, about what is prohibited to Israelites. It says, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother.” It means, “have sex with.” So there is real possibility that Ham actually did something incestuous to his father Noah. If not, he almost did it or came close to it or gave the appearance of it. It is just tricky to understand exactly what he did but it was very offensive to Noah, it should not have been done.

C. So Noah does not curse Ham at all but gives a curse on Ham’s son, Canaan. It is a vehicle by which God talks about the future in a relationship of the Israelites and the Canaanites, so he says, “May Canaan be the slave of Shem,” verse 26 of Genesis 9. “And may God extend the territory of Japheth and may Japheth live in the tents of Shem and make Canaan be his slave as well.” You have a denigration of the Canaanites as a people and the Canaanites are not Africans at all. They are brachycephalic armenoids if you want to know what they are anthropologically, in terms of physical anthropology. So, in case you ever encounter that, as terrible as it is, as I did and was so shocked by it, be sure you understand that that is not what is going on.

IV. Structure of Genesis

May I say one other thing about the structure of Genesis before jumping over to the Exodus and that is this:

A. All of the history of our world is told to us in Genesis 1-11 up to about 2000 B.C. If you look at the very end of chapter 11, the story of Abraham begins there and with Terah and the description of his son Abram and so on and how they left Ur to go to Canaan but on the way settled in Haran partway there. All of this is all human history, all world history, all everything right on that grid. Chapters 1 to 11 bring you from the very beginning, from absolute ground zero to 2000 B.C.

B. Then the story of Abraham alone, just one guy, starts basically in chapter 12 and goes all the way to chapter 24. In other words covers more space in the Biblical text and it is one man's life for 160 years. That tells you something about the way Moses has put the stuff together. If in 11 chapters you tell all history up to one point and then you use more space to describe the next 160 years, you obviously have slowed down. So it is like a real quick pan of the camera and then you stop on Abraham and you focus on Abraham. It is very rapid and you will expect, therefore, with that level of rapidity that much coverage of all of what we would call history, of all that existed in just eleven chapters, you are not going to get much detail and you do not. You are going to get a few key details that will give you a feel for where human beings came from, what they are like, what God’s relation to humans is,

how sin entered the world, etc. The fact that there is this interplay of human and Satan; that is a big issue. The fact that the flood story takes up a big part of it, that God is a judging God and will not fool around with people; he does not tolerate sin forever. He tolerates it temporarily because he is patient and long-suffering and all of that but certainly not forever. You have all those themes that are very important principal themes but Moses gets those out of the way quickly. It is not because he has to get them out of the way because he does not like them but because the story that God has inspired Moses to tell is especially the story of God's people. It is very useful for us to know that there was a flood and all that but what is especially important for us to know is where we fit in to the picture of God's plan of redemption. Increasingly, the Bible story becomes a story of a people, a people that God is creating. He starts that people with one individual Abraham. We do not know why he picked Abraham. It is not said that Abraham had the following eighty-two characteristics and God said, "That's it, perfect for me." It just says that there was this guy Abraham and God called him and said leave your country and your people and so on and then this great promise in chapter 12 that has parallels and gets reviewed and renewed with people like Isaac and Jacob and so on. "I will make you into a great nation," 12:2. "I will bless you, I will make your name great, you will be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all the peoples on earth are going to be blessed through you." So there is some plan for the whole world and it is a good plan. When God blesses, he blesses. He knows how to do it. This is positive stuff. People who oppose the plan, try to wreck it, try to fight it, try to hurt it, are going to be in big trouble with God. "I am going to curse those people, but I am going to bless, through you, the whole world." So this is some plan for the whole world. Here is Abraham saying, "Well, I'm in on the whole human history somehow. I'm a figure in this. How is it going to work?" He learns in part how it works and he learns that his people will one day come back in and occupy the land of Canaan.

IV. Genesis 15

So the last thing I want to look at in Genesis is actually in chapter 15. Many of the other stories I leave for you to read and to study, and I am not worried about the way that they are presented in the literature that you read so I am comfortable with that, but I want to be sure you get this. In Genesis 15 God appears to Abram, who is still called Abram by the way, his name has not been changed yet, and he says, "I am your shield, your very great reward," which I think ought to be translated as the NIV notes have it, "I'm your boss or sovereign." It actually could be translated, "I'm your high salary. Abraham, I pay your salary, I'm your boss," it virtually says that; it is that kind of an idea. "Abraham, you're working for me," in other words. Abraham has some conversation with God and God promises he is going to have offspring and so on and so on.

A. Then he says in verse 16 after the beginning of a deep sleep that comes over Abraham. He says, "In the fourth generation your descendents will come back here because the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." What is that? The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. Who are the Amorites and how come they were sinning and how come it has not reached its full measure and if it did what would that mean? Let me give you a feel for how this works as well as I am able. See that word there *Amoru*. That is the old word in various Semitic languages really but essentially in old Babylonian that refers to this land that we might call northern Canaan. This land *Amoru*, northern Canaan, came to be used also as the terminology for Canaan.

B. What you have then in the Bible is two parallel terms that are each employed the same way. You can say, if you are in Europe, I am from America or I am from the U.S. or something like that. In this case Canaan and Amorite are used essentially interchangeable. Amorite is really the older word, Canaan a newer word that gained currency, Amorite is a very old word. What God is saying to Abraham is, "Eventually I will bring your descendents into this very land that we are standing here talking in." Now, God is not standing there quite in the same way but that is what he is saying to him. "But I can't do it yet because the people of this land are a sinful people and their sin is serious, but it hasn't built up to the level where I, a righteous judge, am content to then destroy them using your people as my agents of justice." But this is an important prediction. Later when the Israelites launched the conquest of the promised land they understand themselves to be an army and you will see when you read, if you

will look carefully at the book of Exodus, that there are a number of places in the book of Exodus where it describes that the Israelites marched by divisions meaning military units and how they were organized as a “*tsava*” army or host and how they must conquer the promised land and drive out the Canaanites and so on. What God did was to use the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham as they grew and multiplied and became quite a big people, as his agents of justice to punish the Canaanites/Amorites, this is the same thing, for their iniquity as a culture. Now as we go along in the course we will talk about some of the things that characterize Canaanite culture; how evil it was, how oppressive it was, how idolatrous it was and so on. How people were misused and abused for personal profit and power. How people did not count. There are a lot of things that any of us would be outraged by today if we have any sense of justice that were common and standard. But God says to Abraham, “It has not gone as far as it is going to and I am going to let it run its course but the time will come when your people will have grown and meanwhile, I know what is happening in this world, and I know how the Amorite wickedness will increase and increase and increase and I am going to use your people to punish Amorite wickedness.”

C. It is a picture of God as a punisher of evil. It is important to appreciate that because I think we live in a world in which lots of people are saying, “You can do anything you want, God doesn’t do anything. Prove to me there is a God. I’ll insult him and if he strikes me with lightening we will both know.” People use those kinds of arguments. In fact, the Scripture is saying in many ways that God regularly reminds his people that he will not tolerate sin and to be aware of that and not to miss it in these kinds of places where it sort of peeps up and says, “Don’t forget me, don’t forget this concept. I am a punisher of sins,” says the Lord. I think it is useful to be aware of that.

Exodus

I. Orienting Data for Exodus

A. First by way of general coverage. This is a book that deals with three big things.

1. Israel's deliverance, how they got out of Egypt. It spends some time on how they got in for that matter. In reviewing that, you have that summarizing some of the things that are described in the end of Genesis.

2. Then the establishment of God's covenant; this special relationship between God and His people that governs the way they relate, that sets out the terms for how they relate.

3. Finally, the tabernacle, starting with the last third or so of Exodus. A big, big theme of the book is the building of the tabernacle. We will look more at that next week.

B. Again, Moses is the author.

C. Same date of composition issues.

D. The coverage here is from the death of Joseph, around 1500 B.C., to the time the Israelites get to Mount Sinai. When the Israelites get to Mount Sinai, which is described for you in Exodus 19, they stay there all the way through the rest of the book of Exodus, all the way through the book of Leviticus and all the way to Numbers 2. Everything starting with Exodus 19 and going all the way through Leviticus and the beginning of Numbers, all of that takes place at one location Mount Sinai because the Israelites stay there for thirteen months, a year and a month. What happens? Why do they stay there? The answer is they stay there to learn who they are as God's people. They stay there to learn his covenant. Day by day Moses receives covenant teaching; he comes down, he teaches it to them and the priests teach it to the people and everybody learns it and they get used to it and they get familiar with it and they puzzle it out and understand it just like you do in seminary. They were all there learning what the facts were, getting oriented. Some of them actually probably had to learn Hebrew because, as I mentioned, Exodus 12 tells us that a great, mixed multitude of people went with them. The Israelites were not an ethnically pure group but rather there was a massive crowd that joined them as they left Egypt and these people knew nothing of Israelite traditions and probably did not speak Canaanite either. Some of them were learning the language and others were learning basic cultural features and getting to know people, but everybody was getting God's covenant. That is why there is so much about things like tabernacle and so on in the book.

E. Emphases

Here is one way to list them:

1. The development of Egyptian oppression. Whenever you speak about how hard things are for somebody in the Bible you will tend to see that this helps people in your church to whom you minister and who are having hard times also. People get through hard times partly by identification with others especially in stories where they know that God is aware of their suffering. It means an awful lot to anybody to know God understands, he is noticing, he is there every second and he is aware of how much I am suffering. That in itself is a great, great comfort. So, these kinds of stories can often help people be reminded of that deeply comforting truth and how long the oppression takes place. A lot of people lived and died as slaves in Egypt. God did not say, "I'll give them an hour and a half of slavery, that will give them a feel for how bad things are, and I'm a nice guy, I'll come right in and deliver them." No, he let them go a long time.

2. His delivery was miraculous and it involved Moses as His agent.

3. Another theme, the reception of the covenant itself, The Ten Commandments, also the “Book of the Covenant” and the basic covenant laws that go from Exodus 20 to Exodus 23.

4. The establishment of proper worship; a great theme of the Pentateuch. The first responsibility of any believer is to worship the one in whom he or she believes; the first thing that should happen. So, if you lead anybody to Christ do not forget to say, “See you in church.” The first responsibility is to begin to worship and that is really clear from a book like Exodus—heavy, heavy emphasis on proper worship. You need help in worship, priests do that, priests are worship helpers. It is especially what they are. You need a place to worship. God emphasizes in the Old Covenant a central sanctuary. We see a really interesting phenomenon. In the Old Covenant you had to worship in one location only. All Israelites have to come together in one place. Deuteronomy 12 especially hits that hard. In the New Covenant you actually have a democratization of worship location. In the New Covenant Jesus says wherever two or three people are in my name, there I am. You can have a full-blown worship service in the back of a Mazda. You do not need a lot of space. You could not get that many people in but you could have a full-blown worship service. You cannot do that in Old Testament times. It has to be in one location. Wherever that Ark and the sanctuary are that is where you go. After this New Covenant Age on earth what will happen, again you revert to the ideal where in heaven every description of heaven is totality worship—everybody worshipping together. All the redeemed of all the ages worshipping together. It is a very interesting pattern. With regard to the basic teaching on worship we are in a funny kind of temporary mode where we have this worship at any location anywhere because we are all worshipping the same Savior. It is really quite interesting how that works. So, do not forget that central sanctuary emphasis because it really is the pattern of heaven. That is the way Hebrews says it, “Moses did what he did based on the patterns of heaven.” It is all supposed to symbolize what is the real, eternal situation that we look forward to. You teach this, things like the tabernacle and how it was built and why, and you will be helping people get ready for heaven. It is actually the function of it.

5. The early tendency of people to rebel against the covenant is seen because of while Moses is receiving the Ten Commandments and other commandments up on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel are down below making idols lead by Moses brother Aaron, that is pretty serious. These are just some of the big themes or emphases of the book.

II. Name Repetition

A. Just a couple more points that I want to make.

1. Exodus 3:4. One really interesting thing that is easy to miss but has quite a number of fascinating reflexes or reflections in Scripture is found in Exodus 3:4. I invite you to look at that. In Exodus 3:4 God sees Moses in this call out of the burning bush and says to him, “Moses, Moses.” He says his name twice. You might say, “Oh, that’s interesting. Hey Moses, Hey Moses, are you there?” You might think it has nothing at all to do with anything. In fact, it is a very significant concept in Scripture. Here are some examples.

2. 1 Sam. 3:4, 10. Samuel, Samuel. You may remember that if you have read that story. It occurs a couple of times in Samuel 3.

3. 2 Sam 18:33; 19:4. David talking about his son, “Absalom, my son, my son. Absalom, my son, my son. Absalom, Absalom.”

4. Matt. 27:46. On the cross, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Name repetition.

5. Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14. God’s calling of Saul. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” By the way, Jesus is obviously using bad grammar, right? He should have said, “Why do you persecute them?” No, it’s a great point. He says, “Why do you persecute me?” One of the most eloquent instances in Scripture of the proof that when you

suffer, God himself actually feels, “Why do you persecute me?” That is what he said. Not them. Saul, Saul, he repeats the story.

6. Matt. 7:21, 22. And then Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. On that day many will say, Lord, Lord.”

7. Luke 6:46. Same thing in Luke. “Why do you call me Lord, Lord?”

B. It turns out that we find that in Semitic culture when you say somebody’s name twice it is a repetition of endearment, of deep, close friendliness. That is the point behind it. If I say to Fritzpert, “Hi Fritzpert, how are you?” That is fine. But if I say to him, “Fritzpert, Fritzpert,” I am saying, “My old pal Fritzpert, how are you brother? It’s great to see you.” That is what it means. The repetition of a name is a style in Semitic of giving indication of close, close friendship, endearment and so on. The usefulness of just knowing that comes especially in these passages where Jesus says, “Not everybody who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom.” “Oh, my old buddy, Jesus. Hey pal, we have been through it together. I’m ready for heaven.” Not everybody who makes that claim is going to get in because I will say, “I never knew you.” That is what he goes on to say, “I don’t know you. How come you’re claiming to be my pal? We don’t really know each other. We’re actually strangers.” That is the point. It is useful to see that. But since that is the system, when God calls Samuel or here calls Moses, you see what he is doing? God is in effect saying, “Moses, my good friend.” God is laying before Moses the fact, “Moses, I’m your friend. I’m your friend for life. I’m your buddy. I’m close to you. I love you. I care about you. You are dear to me.” He does it all by something that we do not have in English. Do you have this in Korean? Not many cultures have it but in Semitic you have got the double name as a technique in Semitic of saying the endearment.

III. Semitic Humility

One other thing, just one other point I want to make relative to a little phenomenon that can easily be missed as you are reading through. In Exodus 4:10 Moses is responding to God’s call and it is a big thing that God asks. There are a lot of stories of people being called in the Scripture to be prophets or whatever and typically they receive a call then they give what we call a ritual protest. “Oh, not me, you really don’t want me.” And God says, “Yes, I do.” Then there is the reassurance. That is a style that is very common in Semitic. People being properly modest by not saying, “Oh yeah! I was waiting for you to call.” You do not say that to God. Instead you say, “Really, me? I’m not worthy.” In some way you give what has commonly been called false eastern humility. It does not mean it is false in the sense of deceptive, it is just that it is exaggerated compared to what we are used to. I just thought if I gave you some examples just as a final little point tonight it would be useful enough because it comes up so often in Scriptural passages. Here is what Moses says in 4:10. “Oh Lord, I’ve never been eloquent either in the past or since you’ve spoken. I am slow of speech and tongue.” Many people have said, “Oh, there it is, Moses had a speech defect.” It is what it sounds like. So you can understand that people have thought that and taught it. I want to suggest to you that it really is not so. Moses goes on to do a lot of talking in the Bible. He is talking all the time, gabbing away. He can talk to huge crowds, they all understand him. It is not like he got up on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments and no one could understand him. He was perfectly understandable. Here are some parallels.

A. Abraham says of himself in talking to the Lord, “I want to talk to you but I am just dust and ashes.”

B. And here is our passage, “I’m slow of speech and have a thick tongue.”

C. Saul, “I’m from the smallest tribe of Israel and my clan is the least of the clans.” It was not so. He was not from the smallest tribe and he did not have the least of the clan, he was a big shot in an important tribe, the tribe that dominated the north in his day.

D. David, “I’m only a poor man and little known.” Oh, yeah. Sure. Shimei goes out and says, “Oh King David, who are you cursing?” He says, “I’m just a dead dog, a flea, that is all I am.” Another flea one, “Dead dog like me,”

says Mephibosheth. Hazael, who is a king says, "How could your servant, a mere dog accomplish such a feat?" He is not a mere dog, he is an important king of Syria.

E. Solomon, "I'm a little child, I don't know how to go in and go out." He is about thirty-years-old when he says this.

F. "Woe is me, I am a person of unclean lips," says Isaiah. Now there is a truth behind this. I do not mean that these people are trying to fool somebody but they are using what we call exaggerated humility or false humility or excessive humility. In some cultures this is a style, as you know. Even in American culture you often will hear, "Oh, what a beautiful, beautiful kitchen." "Oh, this?" Or, "What a lovely dress." "This old thing." It is a kind of a modesty and properly done it is very proper. It is not attempting to deceive but it is not also literal in its meaning.

G. Jeremiah, "I can't talk, I'm only a child." He goes on for fifty chapters talking perfectly well.

H. I think this informs us on Paul, "I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling." I do not think that is entirely literal. Paul was, in many cases, very strong, very tough. It all depends on the situation. He talks of himself as the least of all the saints. That is still part of the style. Chief of sinners. And whoever wrote Hebrews says, "I wrote you only a short letter and I wrote Priscilla and wrote just kidding," because we do not know who wrote Hebrews. It could have been Priscilla, it is a possibility. We do not know. Hebrews, as you may know, is just about the longest letter in the New Testament so this idea that it is only a short letter. Just bear that in mind as a little phenomenon because of all those places where this kind of language is employed and you can easily get the impression as I have heard that key people in God's plan resisted the call. You can get the impression that Moses did not want it, Jeremiah did not want it, Isaiah did not want it; they did not want to do it and God made them do it anyway. That is not really what is happening. They are rather expressing themselves in a normal style of their culture and saying, "Do you really want me?" God is saying, "Yes, I do." Then they say, "Okay, I'm yours." And they become powerful at doing the very thing that they tended in that humility which is not literal to say they could not do.

Law

Will you join me in prayer please?

Father, we ask again for your help. We know that our minds are often corrupted by any number of influences including the great power of our culture which teaches us that other kinds of things are important and that your word is something largely irrelevant or strange or paid attention to by people on the fringe right. We pray that you will help us to be so grateful for your word that we not merely keep it to ourselves but have great joy in passing on its truth to others using its guidance as we serve others and using its powerful, saving content that we might lead people to Christ by its employment and we thank you for a chance to come closer to those goals tonight during this time together. In Jesus name, Amen.

We are going to talk about the book of Exodus and especially about law. In describing what we have going on in the law, I want to be sure that one of the most basic features that will be helpful to you always in explaining Israelite law to others is clear now to you.

I. Two Types of Law

That is that there are two types of laws. These have fancy names. We call them Apodictic and Casuistic. This is the standard terminology for these categories. That is because if we called them simply unconditional demand and conditional example then people would say, "You don't need a PhD for that." We do need PhD's to have confidence in ourselves and prestige so we use these big terms, that is all there is to it. No, in fact, these terms have become rather standard and it is good for you to learn them.

A. Apodictic law is the kind of law that we have in the Ten Commandments for example. It is not conditioned on anything. When it says, "You shall have no other Gods before me," that is it. It does not say, "If you are between the ages of 20 and 65, have no other Gods before me," or "If you are not otherwise worshipping," No, it just says, "Have no other Gods before me." It is unconditional, it is general, it is unlimited, it may be expressed in the positive or the negative but the "you shall not laws" are among the things that keep people out of trouble. If you know that people have a certain natural tendency to do the wrong thing, and if that is true as it sure is, then it makes lots of sense to give quite a number of laws in the form of prohibitions, "Don't do that," which might well be your natural tendency; "Don't do this, don't do that." People are liberated by such things. They are protected by such things. It is not some kind of negative thing that prevents you from having fun; it is a lot like telling a child, "Don't run into the street without looking to see if cars are coming." You are protecting the child. It is a loving prohibition.

B. The Casuistic laws, on the other hand, are what might be called case law where an instance of something is cited. In effect, an example or sample is cited so these are conditional. These do not usually apply absolutely to everyone. They apply only when the conditions described in the law are met. They are very specific as guidelines rather than being universal. So you have a law that says, "If you knock out the tooth of a servant who works for you, that servant goes free from his seven year contract and you lose all the money you paid." That is the way it works. If you do not have a servant that law actually does not apply to you. It applies to those people who have servants and it applies when, and only when, they knock out the tooth of one of their servants. If you do not knock out the tooth or do something comparable, similar, related to it then that is not a law that applies to you.

C. Both kinds of laws are found among the laws that we call the laws of the Pentateuch starting with Exodus 20 and going all the way through the end of Deuteronomy or nearly the end of Deuteronomy. A lot of laws are in the apodictic form. It is useful to have general, all-purpose prohibitions and general, all-purpose statements like "Love your neighbor as yourself." That covers an awful lot, it is always applicable, everybody has to do it. It is also

useful for people to have particular instances laid before them. If an ox gores another ox here is how to handle the situation. You have both apodictic and casuistic and both kinds of laws give guidance to the people. Whether it is apodictic or casuistic, the instruction helps the nation as a whole know what to do. It helps the individual know what to do but also do not forget the Israelites had judges.

II. Israelite Judges

A. You can read about that in one of the important stories of the book of Exodus. If you were reading along in Exodus heading for today's material you noticed that there was a story that really is quite an important one from the point of view of law in Exodus 18. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, visited him and he found that he was not having too much chance to have nice conversations with Moses because Moses was spending day after day judging cases for people who would come to him.

B. Moses was the legal system in ancient Israel. He was it. So, among those thousands and thousands of people when somebody said, "Hey, so and so drove his wagon over my goat kid and he refuses to compensate me," they went to Moses and Moses would rule. Whatever the issue was. If somebody committed a crime among the Israelites, the case was brought before Moses. Moses would pronounce judgment. He was going from morning to evening and Jethro said to him, "This can't be right." In effect he says, "God can't want this, this just can't be what God wants." So he says, "You need to take it to God and see if God approves but it seems kind of obvious to me that what you need to have is a legal system that puts you, Moses, as the Supreme Court taking all the difficult decisions, but you need to have lower courts."

C. You need to have what we call trial courts and appellate courts and then you will be the final arbiter, the court of last resort. This God blessed and once it was undertaken it became a model ever after. You are not going to see outside of Exodus 18 any reference to that legal system. This is considered to be two chapters before the Ten Commandments something you just ought to realize that the Israelites, even before they got their whole law in terms of law code, in terms of their constitution and civil, religious, and criminal laws, they already had in place a court system, various levels of judges, to be able to enforce those laws. You are supposed to catch that and not miss it. Plenty of time was taken in the narrative to make that point. Therefore, the laws are also informative for the judge or if it is several judges, several judges. A lot of these laws as we will see give broad guidance but they do not give specific guidance. We will talk about how that works and why. If you have a legal system with judges there is not really a problem accordingly.

III. Paradigmatic Laws

The reason for that mainly is the way that law is what we call "paradigmatic". That is a term that possibly is not known to everyone. You have to have several syllables in these words or people will not think you are a scholar. A paradigm is a sample that gives guidance.

A. In language study you learn a paradigm maybe the way a certain verb works in the first person, second person, third person and that allows you to reason by extrapolation from that particular verb to how other verbs of the same conjugation might also work. We think paradigmatically, we extrapolate all the time. This is a natural way that human beings operate. Israelite law clearly was paradigmatic. The idea was this, whether it be an apodictic law or whether it be a casuistic law it was appropriate to figure out from what is particularly said to what generally needed to happen in any particular instance.

B. Look with me at an example of a law.

1. We will turn to Exodus 21 and we will just look at a couple of examples that will give a feel for how to interpret it. In Exodus 21 you have laws that protect people. Then in Exodus 22, laws that protect property. Look at

Exodus 21:33. "If somebody uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit has got to pay for the loss. He must pay its owner but then dead animal becomes his." It is as if you bought it. You have to, in effect, buy that dead animal because the person who did own it has to get a fair price for his animal. This law is paradigmatic. It gives an example of how to handle a general kind of situation. You will not find a law that describes what happens if a person digs a pit and a goat falls into it. Does that mean that if goats fell in pits people just said, "We don't know what to do?" No, they did not have the slightest problem. The judge or the elders of a village, if they were functioning as judges, simply said, "Look, we have the general guideline. It uses ox or donkey; it does not have to use any other animal. I do not care if it is a hamster. I do not care if it is somebody's pet beetle. I do not care if it is a camel. I do not care if it is two oxen and one chicken, does not matter. I can reason from this law that whatever it is, you just figure out what a fair price would be for an animal in that condition and age and so on and you require that guy who made a dangerous thing, that is a pit, to pay for it. Once he has paid for it he does get to keep the animals, that is only fair. It is as if he had bought them at a fair market price. That means that the person who did own them can buy another one just like it. It also is the case that nobody in ancient Israel would say, "What do we do? It was not the case of digging a pit; it was a case of building a road that went off a cliff. There is nothing in the law about that." The judge would simply say, "We have the law about the pit and the principle of the thing, the abstract concept is that a dangerous situation was created, of any kind, whatever it is. It could be a badly designed elevator. It does not matter. This pit law is the one from which I will extrapolate." What is interesting about this is that in many ways it is superior to modern law. Ancient law, all of them, all the ones we know about were paradigmatic like the Old Testament law. Old Testament law has a total of 613 commandments. That is it. You must reason from those 613 to the millions and millions of actual situations that might come up. In modern times we do not normally use paradigmatic law. Some societies may but, certainly, most western societies do not. So what happens? Unless there is a law against it, specifically and precisely on the books the defense attorney says my client is not guilty. Indeed the prosecutors will not even make the charge. In other words you can get off on technicalities. People do it all the time. In American law almost every state has a law about what is called burglary. Burglary is defined as breaking and entering in the nighttime with the intent to commit a felony. That is burglary. You have to break in, you cannot walk in. If the door was already open it is not burglary. Your lawyer, first thing, will force the prosecution to prove that you broke into that building. If he could prove that you simply jumped in through the window or walked in through an open door that is not breaking and entering, and they will throw the case out because it is not burglary. If you did not enter the building but somebody threw stuff out to you, you can be a receiver of stolen goods but you cannot be convicted of burglary. You will get off. If it was not in the nighttime you will get off. The first thing the defense attorney does is to say, "Woe, when was sundown?" He goes to an almanac. "When did this happen? When did you get arrested?" It has to be with the intent to commit a felony. It cannot be with the intent just to look around the building. They have to prove that you wanted to do something that was a felony, not a misdemeanor but a felony. It has to be a serious theft of some kind. Lots of people who get charged with burglary get off every year because of a "technicality". This could not happen in Old Testament times. Simply would not happen. The judge says, "What do you mean technicality?" in Old Testament times. "There are no technicalities here. I'm reasoning from what the law says. So if it was not quite nighttime I will reduce your penalty somewhat but you are not getting off. If it was not a felony but only a misdemeanor that you intended to commit, I will reduce the penalty somewhat but you are not getting off." So the judges used their judgment in extrapolating from what was stated to what needed to happen. This is basically the principle of all biblical law and, as well, all biblical ethics. In the New Testament do we have every case covered? Does Jesus talk about what to do if your roommate keeps borrowing your toothpaste? Does he need to? Do you say, "Jesus doesn't help me? My problem is that my roommate borrows my toothpaste. What do I do, it is not in the Bible? I can't find it anywhere. The closest I can come is a verse about Beelzebub in Revelation but that is the closest." No, with ethics, with everything, extrapolation from the paradigm is the way you operate. It is a great system. It is actually good. You have to have people who are willing to be careful and you have to have people who pray for guidance and you want to use your mind wisely to extrapolate carefully and you want to know the laws as well as you can know them in order to reason from what is stated to what needs to happen but that is the system.

You did not have people being dismissed because nobody could prove a “governing legal authority, controlling legal authority” language like that. It did not happen. It really had many superior features to it. It did put a lot of power in the hands of judges. There is no question about that. It put a lot of power in the hands of the village elders if they were functioning as the judges in that local village area. It expected a lot of careful knowledge of the 613 commandments that were stated so that people could reason wisely from them.

2. Another example, this time using an apodictic law, Exodus 22:18. “Do not allow a sorceress to live.” In modern times somebody would say, “I’m not a sorceress, I’m a warlock.” Bible times, no problem because sorceress is an example, it is a paradigm and you can reason from that anybody doing the same level of severe, deceptive garbage is supposed to be put to death. Why, because you want to get mean to sorceresses? No, because the problem is sorceresses keep people from being saved. That is the problem. That is why God hates idols so much. Is he jealous? Is he petty? Does it make him feel bad? No. God is an evangelist and idols will keep you from being saved. If you believe in idols you will not trust in God and get saved. The same with sorceresses, they prevent people from keeping God’s covenant. The system of sorcery was a system of getting your information, your guidance, your standards, even to some degree your ethics from people who should not have been giving them to you so that level of deception is worth the death penalty. If the same level of deception is coming from somebody else in some other way and it is not a sorceress but a warlock or, for that matter, a rhabdomancer. A rhabdomancer is someone who takes a stick and holds it up and drops it in certain patterns and sees how it falls and judges from that how the future is to be predicted. Just as dangerous if somebody places full faith in rhabdomancy. It does not have to be a sorceress. That is how it worked in ancient Israel. As you read the law, as you teach it to others, as you deal with this in classes or Bible studies, or sermons, explain to people the paradigmatic nature of it because that will help them. We have grown up in a culture, most of us, in which there is an attempt to have exhaustive codification of law and you have thousands and thousands and thousands of laws and they are supposed to apply; huge law books and you work off of those law books constantly. In Bible times, people could really memorize the laws; it is not impossible to memorize 613 commandments, and could work from those by memory and could establish real justice. It is based upon the understanding that among the apodictic and casuistic laws, among the 613, there are a sufficient number of paradigms that a wise, honest and prayerful judge could, in fact, establish a decent level of justice among the people of Israel. That is a good thing. That is just the way it was. It is efficient, it is slim and trim, better than the newest, thinnest laptop computers, nice and thin, take it with you anywhere, you can memorize it and if properly followed was a good legal system.

IV. Bifid Structure of Exodus

From there I want to talk about what much of the book of Exodus contains and what much of it leads up to. Many people have noticed that the book of Exodus has a series of stories about the rescue of the people of Israel up to chapter 19; how the Israelites are in trouble; God shows his mighty hand by the plagues; he gets pharaoh finally to let the Israelites go; he protects the Israelites against the army of the Egyptians even after the pharaoh has second thoughts; he allows the Israelites to have miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians and to come into this place that is called Sinai and to gather there and to begin to receive His law. We have a couple of parts to Exodus. If you want to, you can think of Exodus in the same way that many, many Old and New Testament books can be thought of—that is as *bifid*. Let me explain that term. Some of you know it from biology; it describes plants and plant structures that have two equal parts or two complimentary parts. In biblical studies when we talk about a book being bifid, we do not mean that it has two exactly equal parts, we just mean that it is divided, it is a piece of literature that really has two major parts. Exodus is one of those. It has nineteen chapters of stories, narratives, about how the Israelites were made by God to have freedom and to come together as a people and to arrive at Mount Sinai to receive his covenant. Then it has the remaining, roughly half, it is not exactly but its remaining roughly half from chapter 20 on, devoted to receiving that covenant. Exodus is kind of two parts. Once you hit chapter 20 there are not any more stories, they are all laws of various kinds including the very extensive laws

about building the tabernacle and all of the worship implements and even priests' garments and so on, all the things related to worship. You have various laws including worship laws. In the first half of the book, "half" being roughly, you have stories of how it all happened. Many people have said that in its structure, Genesis in a kind of macro way, sort of duplicates what the covenant structure in general does. They would say that the first half of the book is mainly preamble and prologue, and the second half of the book is stipulation, sanction, witnesses, and documentation. That is just to fit the whole thing into Exodus, whether or not that is of interest to you, although I think it is very useful for preaching and teaching.

Covenant Structure

I. Covenant Structure

Let me now talk about the structure of the covenant, which is a far bigger issue in one sense than just the way the book of Exodus is organized. In the ancient world there were many covenants.

A. What is a covenant? A covenant is an agreement, a legal agreement, a binding agreement, that two people or groups make. There were many covenants between individuals. There were many covenants between whole nations. There are often covenants between a great king and the vassal kings that he had conquered and let live and were to exist under his domination or control. There are all kinds of ways you can have covenants but you have two persons or groups and they hammer out some kind of a covenant, an agreement.

B. In the ancient world covenants tended to have these six parts: preamble, prologue, stipulations, document clause, witnesses, and sanctions. Let me describe these and then talk about how they fit with regard to the material we are looking at today because really everything in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy somehow fits within this. Virtually everything in those four books. The book of Genesis is a little more special but virtually everything in the final four books of the first five, the Pentateuch, the books of Moses, is in the category.

1. A preamble is something that identifies who the parties to the covenant are. That is all the preamble is. It just tells you, "This is a covenant between *x* and *y*." A preamble can be as simple as, "I'm the Lord God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, that is who I am, and you are my people." Just that simple. Or just by saying, "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt," that tells you who is who.

2. The prologue is a little bit of background information as to how it is that they came to this place. Really you can regard the first half of Exodus as prologue, some people have. They have called it the "Kingdom Prologue" because it tells you the story of how in the world thousands of people gathered at a mountain in the Sinai wilderness and became the people of the true and Living God. Where did they come from? Why were they there? How did they get there? How did they know enough to show up? The answer is told to you in Exodus 1-19. They started out by being a small group of Israelites, just seventy in all, and they came down to Egypt. The stories of the latter part of the book of Genesis are told in a very summational fashion in early Exodus. The things that you have read took place and finally a huge group grew up and then they were persecuted and suppressed but God protected them and delivered them, etc. Exodus 12 tells us that a large, mixed multitude went out with them, so the people who left Egypt were not just descendants of Jacob but were from various different ethnic groups. They all came together at Mount Sinai and this was all part of the plan of God. He had done it, he had arranged it. He had sent Moses, in the first place, to lead them out. It is something God put together. We find out that, in fact, God is saying, in effect, "You're going to be my people because I've arranged the whole thing. I arranged for you to grow; I arranged for you to become a huge people; I arranged for others to join with you as they saw my mighty power among you and said I want in on that, I want to leave Egypt and join these guys; I sent Moses to deliver you; I brought you here to this place. So I am telling you now what you have to do to fulfill your part of covenant." Thus the Pentateuch, as we have it, really is organized as what some scholars then call a suzerainty covenant. Suzerain is an old word for a powerful king. Not just any king. There are a lot of very weak and ineffectual kings but a suzerain is a great king over large territory and usually over some other lesser governors or kings or something. A suzerainty covenant is the type of covenant that is given by a superior to a group of inferiors. That is the idea. The Israelites did not say, "Okay, here are our proposals, what do you think? You give us ours and we'll exchange them and work them over and see if we can hammer something out here at the bargaining table." It was not that way. No, God said, "I've done all of it for you. You wouldn't be here; you would still be stuck in Egypt as slaves. I've delivered you. I've done it in a way that you know is miraculous and supernatural. I've brought you here to this place. I've

protected you all along the way. I've guided you with a pillar of fire and cloud and I've sent my angel before you and on and on and on, therefore I'm telling you. You are here all because of me and I'm giving you My law." Still, though, it is an agreement. It is not just that God says, "Since I did those things you owe me the following and I'm through. That is it, I'm not giving you anything else, I gave you all I needed to." No, God says, "I will do many things for you. You do these things for me as my vassals, inferiors, and I as your suzerain will do the following things for you." This is something that the Israelites knew about. They knew about these kinds of covenants from Egypt and from Canaan and from generally living in the ancient Near East. They had heard about them, it was part of the general cultural knowledge of the day. It was not mysterious to them. It is like being somewhere and seeing a boat pull up and somebody says, "Come on, I'll give you a ride." You do not have to say, "What is that you're riding on and what do you mean ride and won't the water swallow you?" No, you can jump on a boat and go for ride if you want. People understand that all around the world, it is not some mystery. Likewise, in ancient times, these suzerainty covenants were well-known. There were probably parallels to them at almost every level. Probably in any village there would be some of these covenants. Families made them. People made them. Neighbors made them for various reasons and so they were very used to this whole thing. The Israelites knew and understood and received by God's grace their constitution as a people in a form that was very familiar to them. The covenant contains preamble and prologue. There are two ways to look at it. You can say, basically, it is the book of Exodus or some people have said, "You know, you can really just say that the first few words of chapter 20 can be considered a kind of summation of both preamble and prologue." In other words, verse 2, look at chapter 20:2. "I'm the Lord your God", that tells you who I am and who you are, "who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." That again tells you who I am and you are. "I brought you out of Egypt," that is where you were, you were slaves there and I rescued you from it. It does tell you in a summational fashion what the first nineteen chapters tell you.

3. Then come the stipulations. They are the biggest block. The stipulations are the laws, all the various laws of all the various kinds. The 613 commandments come in at this point. In any covenant the main part is the stipulations that tell you what the agreement is supposed to be. You do this; here are the laws, plenty of reminders. If you do this, I will bless you, I will protect you, I will watch over you, I will be your God, I will be among you, and give you good things. There are all kinds of interaction throughout the laws in terms of stipulations. Then the three final points.

4. Sanctions. These are what if you know anything at all about behavior modification, operant conditioning, B.F. Skinner. How many of you have heard of B.F. Skinner? How many of you have had a course with B. F. Skinner? I did, I really did, he is quite a guy. I was a sophomore in college. You know there are various ways to punish and reward and reinforce and so on and God knew that before B. F. Skinner figured it out. God knew this in advance of B. F. Skinner, I am not kidding you. The sanctions are that.

a. The sanctions are promises of benefits that will come if you keep the covenant. "If you keep my covenant, here are the things you'll get." It is sort of like what we might the carrot in the pair, the carrot and the stick, when you think about motivating an animal.

b. The sanctions also contained curses. "Here are the bad things that will happen to you if you don't keep my covenant." That's the stick.

If you are thinking of operant conditioning here are the positive reinforcements and here are the negative reinforcements and punishments as the curses. So the term blessings and curses is employed. It was employed in the ancient world; it was employed in God's covenant with His people Israel, we use that terminology. If you want to just translate those into positive reinforcements and rewards as well as negative reinforcements and punishments. That is what they are.

5. There is also then a list of witnesses. Why? In the ancient covenants that were outside of the Bible, the Egyptian and Babylonian and so on, they would list various gods and goddesses and they would say, "Hey you gods and goddesses, keep an eye on this and if you see any of my people, my vassals, not obeying this I expect you to

get them.” It was almost like a prayer to the gods to help the king, help the sovereign, enforce the covenant. In the case of the covenant that we have here at Mount Sinai the usual witnesses are “heaven and earth”, another merism. Remember merism from last week, the expression of totality by citation of polarity. If you site heaven and earth as a constant, Moses says, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day you break this covenant, says the Lord, you’re in trouble.” Heaven and earth means all creation. So in a way the witnesses most commonly sited for the covenant are everything. Everything is watching, all creation is watching. “You are the focus of all creation in regard to your being faithful to me in keeping this covenant.” This is a big thing in creation. This is a big focus. “Don’t blow it,” says the Lord.

6. Finally, the documentation. Here there is just provision made that each party has a copy of the agreement. You know if you get a car loan or something, they will have a copy and you will have a copy. It is not unusual. We have an analogy of this, it is perfectly normal. They did the same thing. The vassal got a copy and the sovereign got a copy. Here is where a little detail might be worth appreciating. We are told that Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with two tablets, right. Many people have said, “Oh gee, they must have been little tablets because you can get quite a bit on a tablet. Cuneiform, the kind of writing of that day, you can get a lot on there. They must have been awfully small tablets, you know, the kind of thing he could put in his vest pocket or something, because he only got five of them on one. The Ten Commandments aren’t that long; you can read them there in one chapter. He must have had five of them on one tablet and five on the other, right?” No, that is highly unlikely. It does not say that all ten were on both tablets but it certainly is, from everything we know about the ancient world, the only likely scenario. What does Moses do? It takes a little bit of time because it has to get built and all that. Basically, Moses brings down both copies, God’s copy and Israel’s copy, and he places them together. Where? In the Ark. If you did your reading for today you know the Ark was built and they had it as a symbol of the presence of God and the primary content of the Ark was the two tablets. The Ark represents the place where the covenant, that is what the tablets are, the Ten Commandments being the key terminology and key concepts of the covenant. The Ten Commandments are put together, both suzerain’s copy and vassal’s copy, so that together in one place is symbolized at least, and hopefully properly and effectively eluded to, but at least symbolized the fact that this covenant is what unites God and his people.

II. Covenant = Extended Kinship

Recently a well-known scholar, Frank Cross, has said the best way to think of covenant is this—extended kinship. I think that is very helpful. When I read that I said, “Wow, that’s good, I like that.” I have not been using that term all these years in teaching but you are the first Old Testament Survey group to get it. I just thought that that was very succinct and helpful. What is the point here? Always a covenant defines a relationship. A covenant brings people together. That is what a covenant does. It produces a connection. In the ancient world, yes, there were technically covenants that are sort of parallel to a mortgage or a car loan or something, there were those. But even those, nothing of the quality of the Old Testament covenant, do bring people together who otherwise have no business. Now suddenly, you deal with each other. If you get a car loan you are going to make payments every month; they are going to look for the payments in the mail. If you do not send the payments in, they are going to contact you; at first very graciously and then more and more strongly. Suddenly you have a connection. You are in each others’ face after a while. It is amazing how that works. So it is in a covenant. Cross says, really what covenants do is produce a kind of extended kinship. You are obviously not related genetically or related by family but it is as if you become family, you become close. There is a connection made when a covenant is entered into. He uses the analogy of kinship to describe it. The person with whom you have a covenant becomes a relative of yours. That language actually gets used in Scripture. That is one reason why I was so pleased to see this; it put a couple of things together for me. We have mention made in the prophetic books, Amos for example, of the covenant of brothers among nations. You say, “How are nations brothers?” But all of a sudden if you realize, of course, the basic overarching idea is that of kinship and nations can enter into covenants and function like brothers

on a grand scale. This is kind of an analogy between brothers in a family and nations that are neighbor states of one another. Brother covenants with nations probably referred to covenants among nations that are neighbors and that is what is referred to in the particular case of Amos 2, for example. So it works on the international scale, it works in the sense of God and the Israelites. What does God say to them? "You are my people." This is fleshed out more and more strongly in Scripture but there are various places where he refers to Israel as his son or calls himself their Father, etc. In the New Testament this idea that we are God's kin, we are his relatives and part of his family, is introduced in the strongest possible way to the new covenant, really, truly makes us God's children and Christ's brothers and sisters. It is a great thing. So the concept extended kinship I think it is very useful. I am very grateful that Cross worded it that way and it is not terminology that I had heard. In his latest book, he says, "Hey listen, here is what I think we ought to be thinking about covenant. We ought to think of it as representing extended kinship." It is his big point of this book. It is his big issue in his latest book that has just come out. I think it is true. It is a good, helpful way of thinking about what covenant is. I want to make a couple of distinctions here that I hope will also be helpful.

III. Hierarchy of the Law

This is the kind of thing that I believe helps people when they are trying to understand how the hierarchy works. What you really have is this—you have a hierarchy of two and then ten and then 601. What in the world am I talking about?

A. The two commandments that sum up all biblical law as Jesus himself points out are: "Love God with your whole heart," which is interestingly from Deuteronomy 6:5 not one of the Ten Commandments. Notice that? Not in the Ten Commandments. And Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." These were recognized in Judaism even before New Testament times, we believe. How so? Remember the story where a scholar, a "lawyer", a scribe, comes to Jesus and says, "What are the two great commandments?" Jesus says, "What do you think they are?" He knows the answer, he says, "Love the Lord your God and Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "That's right." Then the guy doesn't know what to say. He was trying to trip Jesus up and Jesus said, "Yeah, you got it." So he says, "Well, who is your neighbor?" That gives Jesus the chance to tell the story of the good Samaritan that we have in Luke 10. He tells you, of course, your neighbor is anybody in need. To be a neighbor is to help people with needs. You are a need-helper, a need-meeter. That's what you are, anybody, friend, foe, fellow believer, nonbeliever, whatever. But anyway, Jesus makes it clear reflecting what people were seeing anyway. This was commonplace knowledge, apparently, in Judaism that, of course, these two commandments really do capture the essence of all the law and the prophets. It is as if you were saying, "If you get these two commandments, all other commandments are footnotes to these; all the things the prophets say are footnotes to these; the whole rest of the Old Testament are footnotes to these."

B. Then you have the ten. Now we call these the Ten Commandments. Do you know they are never called the Ten Commandments in the Bible. They are called the Ten Words. Special distinction is given to them. These are the Ten Words because they do occupy a particular category. They are the ones that are given directly by God; God writes them on the tablets. Everything else Moses hears, comes down, writes, teaches the people, and so on, Moses is the intermediary but God directly writes the Ten Words, and they are called words, *debarim* (*dabar*) in Hebrew, rather than commandments, *mitswoth* (*mitzvah*) or *hoq*, the two main words for commandments in Hebrew. That is a really interesting thing. Just a little terminological clue that there is something very special about them. If you will look at them the first four are describing what it is to love God with your whole heart. The first four commandments are, indeed, about loving God. Let's look at those real quickly in Exodus 20. "Have no other Gods before me," verse 3. "Don't make any idols," 4 to 6. "Don't misuse the name of the Lord your God," verse 7, and "Honor the Sabbath day, keep it holy, it is a Sabbath to the Lord your God." Those are laws that focus on how you are to serve God, how you relate to Him. The final six focus on loving neighbor as self. So they go to the Leviticus 19:18 summation. "Honor father and mother. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't

give false testimony. Don't covet." These are about how you relate to people. The great division of the two great commandments then is reflected in a nice ratio. It does not have to be absolutely even; you've got four of one kind and six of another.

C. Then after that you have the remaining 601, some of them apodictic and some casuistic; that gives you all kinds of paradigms from which, again, you are following the ten. So in the 601, you are just trying to duplicate what is in the ten. You are just trying to specify in a particular instance what the ten tells you. The ten are just telling you what the two tell you.

D. Now this is interesting, very interesting, because lots of people will say, "There is none of this in the New Testament, we don't have any law." In fact, some New Testament believers got that misimpression. Paul had to deal with this constantly. Parts of several of his letters are devoted to telling people, "Watch out, you are being told that there is no law obligation on your part and you're being sold a bill of goods by false teachers. They are telling you another gospel. They are mixing you up. Don't fall for it." Why? Because the two great commandments are certainly reiterated in the New Covenant. Are they not? Jesus himself says, "Hey this is it." Paul mentions both of them in various ways. Paul says at the end of Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." That means meet each others' needs. That is what the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" means, that fulfills the law of Christ. He knew that Christ had taught those. Furthermore, the Ten Commandments or the Ten Words, but we so often call them the Ten Commandments so I will stay with it, the Ten Commandments are also reiterated in the New Testament in various ways. It would take a while to show you all that but you will see it. Even the Sabbath law, Paul says, "One person regards one day the same, all days the same, one person sets the Sabbath but you are still supposed to rest." Rest and worship are still big, big parts of New Testament teaching. In fact, in the book of Acts in chapter 6 there is a place where the apostles are worried that if they have to get into any kind of food distribution they will neglect the ministry of the word in prayer, the ministry of the word in worship. They are afraid that it will prevent them from leading and giving Sabbath leadership, worship leadership, as they want to give. In addition you could argue also that there is one more. You could actually say there are twelve commandments that are renewed from the Old Testament and there is, in a sense, one more and that is because you have John 13:34 where Jesus says, "I'll give you a new commandment, love one another." I do not really think it is a new commandment, I think it is a way of making sure that people do not think that "love your neighbor as yourself" does not apply right within the church. I think that is what He is doing. It is not really a new commandment but he says it that way in John. "I will give you a new commandment, 'Love one another the way I have loved you, love one another.' This is how everybody will know you are my disciples if you love one another." If you wanted to you could argue, "Well, there is kind of thirteen commandments in the New Covenant." The key is that if these twelve are renewed in the New Covenant as I assure you they are, you are going to see them in various ways. Jesus mentions some, the apostles in their writings mention some. In total you can spot the Ten Commandments and certainly the two great ones. Then really the basics of the Old Covenant, the important overarching principal, crucial paradigms are actually shared by both covenants. Are they not? That is a nice interconnection. The great thing is, however, that the 601 are removed as specific things. What is in the 601? How to build the tabernacle takes up about eighty of them or something, I do not know what the number would be in total but it is an awful lot. We do not have to build a tabernacle anymore. How to sacrifice properly takes up a hundred of them surely. We do not have to do that anymore. How to handle civil law problems, what do you do with someone you catch breaking into a house and so on? That is different now because our kingdom is Christ's kingdom and it is not of this world. He does not have a civil kingdom. So, we do not say that the church enforces laws like that. We live in whatever society we live in and those societies enforce laws. Civil law is now secularized; it is no longer "Israelitized" if you want to think of it that way. But we keep the essence of the Old Testament covenant. There is a general, "essential" unity between the Old Covenant and the New in that both have a legal obligation and these laws were not badly stated when God stated them. The two great commandments and the so-called Ten Commandments. They were not badly stated. They still have wonderful applicability and they are still very useful and they still give definition from which we can extrapolate, extrapolate from the paradigm, to good

behavior. That is why Christians still teach the Ten Commandments. Martin Luther said in this regard, “Anybody who doesn’t teach the Ten Commandments ought to be kicked out of the church as an infidel. How can you possibly not teach the Ten Commandments?” It is so basic. You think you are Christians and your kids do not know the Ten Commandments. You better know those, they are basic. I think it is a guideline to us. Be sure that the kids in your Sunday School, the kids in your youth group, the adults in your church know the Ten Commandments and take them seriously. It is very, very important and valuable. They will provide real guidance for living a Christ-like life. These commandments help you follow Christ. They are not just some old, narrow restrictive things left over from a past era, they are good helpful guidelines from which you could extrapolate all kinds of good things.

IV. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the biggest change from Old Covenant to New. That is the massive, dramatic, ontological, referring to the very being of people, adjustment from the old to the new. In the Old Covenant, did some people have the Holy Spirit indwell them, lead them, fill them? Sure. Mention is made of it in various places. Did most people have it? No. Most people knew the Holy Spirit’s influence mainly as part of their national identity. In the New Covenant every believer gets the Holy Spirit living in him or her. So much so that if anybody finds a disciple like Paul does in Acts 19 and 20 when he comes into Ephesus, finds believers there who had accepted John’s testimony about Christ but had not really been baptized in Christ, his first question is, he found some believers there and found they did not have the Holy Spirit, “You guys don’t have the Holy Spirit? What?” He says, “How were you baptized?” They said, “John’s baptism.” “Well, of course.” Then he baptized them in the name of Christ, they received the Spirit. That really is an indication of the way that we have got to remember how crucial the Holy Spirit is to the New Covenant. When Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 31, “I won’t have to write the law for them on tablets of stone, I can write it on their hearts.” I can put it in their brains, in other words. That is what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit interacts with your brain. That is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit.

Numerical Parallelisms and the Meaning of The Term “Love”

I. Numerical Parallelisms

Sometimes when people read the statements in the middle of the Ten Commandments about, “I the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation,” and so on, they say, “Wow! How can that be? That is totally unfair. This doesn’t make any sense. God would punish the great grandchildren for what the parents did? That is unreasonable.” I just want to show you how sometimes knowing a phenomenon that can be observed in Scripture, if you know how to look for it, can solve a question. This is just an attempt to show you a perfectly sensible, and once you see it, I think even an obvious conclusion, not original with me but I am just relaying it to you. First of all to appreciate how this works, a scholar named Gervitz at the University of Chicago, a number of years ago, published a book in which he described how the numerical parallelisms work. (Stanley Gervitz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* [University of Chicago Press, 1963]). Now, we will learn more about parallelism when we study Hebrew poetry.

A. When they want to have a synonym for the number one, the closest they can come is the number two; that is what they do. (Job 33:14; Ps 62:11)

B. When they want to have a synonym for three they parallel it by four. It is a style of parallel. I am not going to give you time to copy all these down but you can generate these with a computer any time in a concordance program. (Prov. 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11)

C. When you want to parallel six you use seven. (Prov. 6:16; Job 5:19)

D. When you want to parallel seven you use eight. Give a portion to seven or even to eight. Seven shepherds, eight princes. There is a story in one of the Ugaritic epics. King Keret wife gave birth to seven children, yes, eight were born to her. You might say, “Which was it?” They would not have any problems with that at all in the ancient world; they knew what that meant. It meant, basically, she had a whole bunch of children. That is the way the parallelism works in some of the numbers. You get N , $N + 1$ parallelism. (Eccl. 11:2; Micah 5:5)

E. Here is a special case of N , $10N$. One thousand to ten thousand. There are several examples of that. (Deut. 32:30; Micah 6:7; 1 Sam. 18:8; Ps. 91:7)

F. A special exception N , $11N$ in the boast of Lamech, “If Cain is avenged seven fold, Lamech seventy-seven,” (Gen. 4:24). Then there is an N , $70N$. This is *really* big. Jesus says, “Not just seven times but seventy times seven,” (Matt. 18:22). That is N to $70N$. That really breaks the pattern. That is a dramatic extension of the usual “numerical parallelism”.

G. But there is an even greater exception and that is the one we are looking at. Three or four to thousands. That is big. That is our passage. “Yes,” says God, “not that I punish the fourth generation for what the first generation did.” That is not the point at all. It is rather, “If generations keep sinning against me and breaking my law, I will keep punishing them. If the first generation does it, I will punish it. If the generation after that does it, I will punish them too. I’ll have to do that on to maybe the third or fourth generation, but what I want to do is to bless thousands of generations who love me.” So the parallelism demonstrates that God’s purpose is to show love, his loyalty, his *hesed* in the Hebrew, “to thousands of those who love me.” The contrast is between what he will do, “If the generations keep doing it, I’ll have to keep punishing, but what I want to do, which is essentially forever, to be a blessing to my people generation after generation, if only they will remain faithful.” The meaning is, “I will, if I have to, punish successive generations but not for long. I really don’t want to do this for long.” It may go on for

awhile but that is why it is limited to three or four, it makes the suggestion that this is not forever. “But what I would like to do is bless my people forever if only they will keep my covenant.” What it really shows is what you might think it shows. It shows the desire of God and the invitation of God for his people to be obedient to him and enjoy his blessing. It is not really a statement about how he unfairly judges at all. If we had time I could show you how the Hebrew is applied in other passages and it really does not mean punishing X for Y, it means applying the same punishment that you applied to X also to Y. That is really what it means in terms of translation. That is a little thing, I just thought I would show it to you because it often comes up and people wonder about it and puzzle it out and try to understand its significance and it is useful, I think, to be aware of that.

II. The Meaning of the Term “Love”

A. There is another kind of thing that I would also like to show you because it helps us define terminology. William Moran back in 1963 wrote a very nice article that many scholars have referred to called “The Ancient Near Eastern Background for the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” published it in a journal called *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (24). What Moran demonstrated was this—when we read the commandments “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind,” and “Love your Neighbor as yourself,” we are not reading about attitude at all. We are reading about action. To love is to do acts of love, to show love. It is not a feeling. So you do not just say, “I just love God. Oh! Oh! Oh! Yes! I love ya!” “Well, there’s that commandment fulfilled.” “I just love my neighbor. You are a sweetheart. I love ya!” “There is another one.” No, it is what I do for her that is obedience to that commandment to love her as my neighbor, as myself, and it is what I do for God that demonstrates it. Moran just showed this by showing from many ancient documents from all over the time period of the Bible, Old Testament time period, how this terminology of love really functions. Here is one king writing to another, “I’m the king’s servant and the one who loves you. Various kings, my lord, just as I love the king my lord,” he is writing to a Pharaoh in Egypt, “so do these other kings. They are all servants of my lord.” That is what it means. “Who will love if I die?” Here is Rib-Addi writing about a revolt, “Half the city loves the sons of Abdi-Ashirta; half of it loves my lord,” meaning the Pharaoh. “If you send me no answer, I’ll leave the city and go away with the people who love me.” Are these a bunch of gay people? No, that is not it; that is not what is going on. Look at this one, “You will love Ashurbanipal as yourselves,” says one vassal king about his son. “The king of Assyria, we will love.” Here is reference to David and Hiram, “Hiram had been a lover of David all his life,” (1 Kings 5:1), meaning, they were allies, they did things for each other, they were in league, they functioned as allies function. That is the usage.

B. What you really find is this, in the ancient world in referring to things like loyalty, faithfulness, decency, doing things for one another, being allies, being closely supportive, in international diplomacy they use the terminology of love, and by the way, also hate. I could show you a whole bunch of passages relating to hate. So and so hates this. So and so hates that. When you read in Malachi, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” Ancient people did not understand that to mean, “I just love my people and just hate those Edomites.” It rather, “I have made an alliance with my people, they are in my covenant. I don’t have a covenant with the Edomites.” That is the point. The language of love and hate is the language of international diplomacy and also of personal favor and service and so on.

C. You love your master or you hate your master. Jesus says, “You can’t serve both God and mammon and you’ll either love the one and hate the other.” He is not talking about some vicious attitude of hate as apposed to some warm attitude of love. He is talking about you will favor one and not favor the other. So, even Jesus uses typical love-hate language. The point is, when we are told to love the Lord our God, it is something we do. You do it regardless of how you may feel. You love your neighbor whether or not your neighbor is much fun to be around. You do not have to worry about saying, “I just don’t feel love, I don’t mind doing things for my neighbor but I just don’t feel this deep, pure love that I should.” That is not really part of the command at all. Your feelings are a separate issue. It is what you do that really is important. If we can learn that, I think it is very good.

D. By the way, do not also get trapped into the old flaw of saying, "Oh, it says love your neighbor as yourself, therefore, I must first love myself." In the New Testament we have Paul describing, for example, all of the wickedness that will come in the last days and he says, "People will be lovers of self," as wickedness. So that commandment is not saying, "Love people as you love yourself," it is saying, "Love people as you want the reciprocation to occur, as you would like to be love, that is, treated." Treat people as you would like to be treated. Jesus sums it up by saying in other language that makes it perfectly clear, "Do to others as you would have others do to you." That is what it means. It does not mean you have a right to self-love. That is prohibited in Scripture.

Leviticus

I. Orienting Data for Leviticus

A. A special emphasis of Leviticus is the achievement of holiness. That is a wonderful thing. If you approach it that way, if you teach, preach on it, and so on, and say, "Look, we are going to study this because it has as its goal the achievement of holiness." There is a lot of good that will come out of that. It is not just holiness, maybe in ritual or something, it is holiness in all areas of life including worship but also including daily life.

B. Moses is the author again.

C. We are at Mount Sinai, so that is when this is happening.

D. All of Leviticus is received by the Israelites at Mount Sinai. They are still camped right there and they get part of Exodus and the remainder of Leviticus.

E. What are the emphases?

1. It starts with five types of sacrifice. You can read about them in the first five chapters. If you wanted a sixth type it would be the Day of Atonement sacrifice, just in case you are puzzled over why it might say "What are six types of sacrifices?" Because that is a special category; the atonement sacrifice on Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement. There is a desire that people properly worship because worship is the first thing you owe to the god you believe in. Naturally, when people say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian, I just don't go to church." They are something really weird. It is like saying, "I'm a great athlete. Yeah, I weigh 516 pounds but I really am a great athlete. I'm in shape. I don't exercise. Why would I exercise?" It is just nonsense, it is not true. If a person says, "I follow Christ but don't worship Him," they are saying something that does not connect. How could it be? People need to appreciate that, it is important. Leviticus is partly pushing in that direction.

2. You also have the priesthood. God wants to connect to those people, the priests help make that happen. Of course, if it can happen by God dwelling in us, wow! What a connection, eliminating the need for human priesthood at all. The new covenant, indwelling of Christ through his Spirit, really is a dramatic elimination process with regard to things like the priesthood, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and so on.

3. [God's insistence on worship according to his standards.]

4. How uncleanness can happen and how to correct it is a very big thing. You constantly get in Leviticus advice about how to be pure and how to be clean. There is a lot of clean, pure stuff going on. This makes you unclean, this makes you clean. Much of it simply teaches the principle that you need to be clean. In the New Covenant the cleansing takes place in other ways from what it does in the Old. There are mechanisms for cleansing in terms of forgiveness and trusting in Christ. In the Book of Acts, several times the disciples say, "Our hearts are made pure." They really do talk about, "We're ritually clean. We are as clean as the high priests could get in the Old Covenant before God, worthy to be in his presence, not because we're good but just because Christ has accomplished so much." That is a big theme. As you teach Leviticus and preach it, you can help people see how important it is for them to be pure and holy before God. It really does, it almost whets your appetite for the New Covenant when it can be done for you by God's grace rather than the Old Covenant when you have to struggle to try to accomplish it. It is very powerful material that way.

5. [Atonement (including the Day of Atonement)]

6. There are also laws about proper eating and about sex and other things and whether or not these are specifically to be renewed or not in the New Covenant, and I would say no, they are not specifically renewed, they do tell you God cares very much about your sex life. He wants it to be pure and holy. That gets defined for us in the

New Covenant with the statement, for example, in Hebrews, "Let the marriage bed be undefiled." It is a real, clear thing how you have sexual purity. But you can see how important it is in Leviticus, Leviticus 18, for example.

7. So it is with the food laws. Then you might say, "God cares what I eat, really?" The answer is yes, because he cares that you should be one of his people who is disciplined enough that you eat properly and try to live in a manner that is healthy. It is the top priority of all these? No. It is not the top priority in the Old Covenant, it is not the top priority in the New but it is an issue. If you think that somehow what you eat or how often you eat or whether you eat or whether you eat well is of no relevance to you as a child of God, a book like Leviticus can help really correct that. It is very useful in that way.

8. [Blessings and curses accompanying the covenant]

9. [Vows]

II. [Outline of Leviticus]

Numbers

I. Orienting Data for Numbers

A. What is especially interesting about Numbers is this—at the beginning of Numbers they leave Mount Sinai, so now they have received the covenant. They have really received what we call the Sinai Covenant. What is the Sinai Covenant? From Exodus 20 to the end of Leviticus, that is the Sinai Covenant. It is a great big thing. It is a book and a half of what we call books of the Bible. With Numbers, however, the reception of the law does not cease, rather, the Israelites now set out for the promised land and we get a mixture of stories about their travels on the way to the Promised Land which take thirty-nine years, it is rounded off to forty, but technically take thirty-nine years, along with a mixture of laws on issues that come up as they travel. So what God, in his mercy did, was to give them a covenant, get them all settled enough to leave Sinai. “Okay, you’re a people. That is your basic constitution.” Then very mercifully and graciously gives them some further laws in Numbers as the occasion requires. As they raise questions, as they encounter problems, as things happen, he pronounces those laws. He has given them a pretty heavy bunch in the first place and so giving them a little time to assimilate those and get new ones is useful. If you want a rough analogy, it certainly did not come about the same way, you can think of the United States Constitution. You have the constitution but then you have the long list of amendments. Those amendments became part of the constitution, they are very important, they are relied on all the time, they are just as if they had been written there in the first place. As the years went by, and the need was seen for those amendments, they were added. God did something like that for the Israelites. Showing that, not so much that he had forgotten to include stuff in the first place, there is no hint of that, no need to even think that way, but rather, it is the way he works with us now. It is the way that he has always worked. He gives you enough information to get started and he keeps teaching you and you keep learning and you keep growing in grace and so that is exemplified for us in the way that God continues to teach his people as they wander in the wilderness and partly because of their sins.

B. Again, Moses [is the author.]

C. Date of Composition: basic same time except that it goes over a period of time.

D. The coverage is that forty-year period between getting to Sinai and getting to the Promised Land.

E. Emphases

1. Preparation for military conquest. In Numbers you will notice the Israelites are described as moving “by divisions”. That is a military term. They camped by divisions. They are starting to think of themselves as an army. This is a new thing to them. They were not in the army in Egypt. They could not fight, God had to fight for them as they left Egypt but now they are beginning to think that way.

2. Constant leadership and care. When you preach Numbers that is a great theme to preach and teach.

3. The people’s tendency to doubt God. So they have a lack of confidence. Again and again they demonstrate that.

4. They demonstrate it so severely when they have a chance to enter the promised land and will not because they are afraid, they are afraid of the Canaanites, that God says, “Okay, you don’t want to go into the promised land? I’ll let another group go in.” And He says, “You adults will die off, it will be your children that go into the promised land.” That is the forty year time period to let most of the adults die off and let the younger people and little children grow up and enter the promised land as the new generation. That new generation, by the way, is going to need a whole new statement of the law to them and that is what Deuteronomy is. They are going to need that.

5. [Reception of additional laws as conditions described in the narrative lead to the need for those laws]

6. [Alternation of law and narrative]

7. The blessing of Israel through a pagan prophet. That is the story of Balaam. Fascinating how God, if he needs to, can use some pagan, use an idol-worshipping pagan. Can God do that? Sure, if he wants to he will do it.

8. Israel's committing cultic immortality. That is informative. Sadly, even in Numbers 25 you have examples of the way the Israelites get into full-blown, cultic prostitution and all the miseries that it brings about. The Israelites got suckered into a lot of bad stuff.

9. Major preparation for the new conquest.

10. Finally, actual, initial, what you might call token, conquest of the promised land because they do, by the end of the book of Numbers, get into what we call the Transjordan, the area to the east of the Jordan River, not the heartland of Israel yet but certainly the area to the east of the Jordan.

I know that came fast but these materials are also available to you in a lot of places. This is not some mysterious thing. Most study Bibles will have many of these same bits and pieces of data. Certainly, any Bible dictionary, you just look up Numbers and one way or another it is going to give you these themes.

II. [Outline of Numbers]

Deuteronomy

I. Orienting Data for Deuteronomy

II. Covenant Structure in Deuteronomy

Here I have done something different. I have not said what is the overview and what are the main themes and so on because I wanted to have you see the structure, especially how carefully a book like Deuteronomy is structured relative to the six elements of the covenant—the preamble, prologue, stipulations, document clause, witnesses, and sanctions. They are all there, they are very visible in Deuteronomy and it is a very overt structuring as a covenant because this is a new people, and they need to realize they too are part of God's covenant. They are getting a covenant relationship. This is not Mount Sinai, this is forty years later. They are now in northern Moab ready to go into the Promised Land, but they need to know they are God's covenant people. All the essentials of the covenant that was originally given in Exodus and Leviticus, the Sinai Covenant, and all the amendments, as it were, added on during the days of the Numbers, wandering in the wilderness are now reorganized, reformatted, in some cases summarized, in some cases expanded, and put together as a restatement of the covenant. But many people then think, "Well, that means Deuteronomy is kind of throw-away stuff. Who needs to learn Deuteronomy?"

On the contrary, it is like something that is the final draft as opposed to the first draft. I do not mean it is really that way with God and he says, "Gee, I can write a lot better than if I thought long enough; I just need more time, a little more sleep, I'll be fine." No, that is not so. Deuteronomy really is a kind of a culmination law and some people have said it is the most important book in the Bible for understanding the big picture and overview. There are many people who will say you need to know Deuteronomy far more than you need to know the other four books of the Pentateuch. Let me commend to you the importance of the things that are said, the themes, the topics, how crucial they are to appreciating the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament as well. We will talk about how the prophets relate to Deuteronomy, how the historical books relate to it. Deuteronomy, once it is stated, really kind of gets a little bit pride-of-place even over Exodus and Leviticus. So do not underestimate the significance of this book just because it has kind of a dull name like "second law." It is really pretty important.

A. You have got a very long prologue this time, long summations of what it is God did for His people. (1:1-5:5)

B. You have got a brief mention of witnesses, in this case heaven and earth. (4:26)

C. You have got a solid preamble. (5:6)

D. Lots of stipulations. (5:7-26:19)

E. Extensive document clause. (27:1-8)

F. Extensive sanctions. (27:9-30:20)

G. Again, a mention of witnesses, heaven and earth. (30:19-20)

H. More document clause. (31:1-29)

I. Then both the Word of God and a poem are witnesses. This is very interesting. Now by this time the Bible is beginning to be formed, Moses has written Genesis and so on and he is writing Deuteronomy for them. Now there is a Bible. So it, the Word of God, functions as a witness to keep you on track. So you begin to get the concept of a scripture and how it works in connection with God's covenant. What does the Bible do for you? Does it help you get Sunday School pins? Does it help you answer questions in Bible trivia quizzes or something? Well, yes, but that

is pretty unimportant compared to the fact it is there to help you know how to be God's people, how to belong to him and how to serve him and how to fulfill his covenant. Part of that Bible, the Song of Moses itself, which is a poem in chapter 32, function as witnesses. It is very nice, it is a very important and useful phenomenon. (31:19-26)

J. More sanctions in musical poetic form. (32:1-33:29)

K. Then finally an epilogue, a brief twelve-verse epilogue of transition. How do you get from Moses, the great leader, the first leader of the people, what is going to happen after he dies? The answer is God has a way of bringing about successors. God has a plan for his people on into the future and that is the position that Joshua occupies. So he gets introduced at the end of the book of Deuteronomy in order to prepare us for what will now come in the history of the people including the conquest of the Promised Land. I have said the things that I wanted to get across in this lecture. As you can tell by now, it is obviously sampling. There are certain things I want to be sure you hear that I hope are helpful. I am trusting that you are doing the reading and thus getting the balanced picture because I do not give a balanced picture in these lectures. Some people would say I am unbalanced. That's alright. (34:1-12)

Let us close in prayer.

Thank you Father for the time we have had together tonight. Our greatest joy would be that we take your word and really use it, first upon ourselves so that it guides us but also that we take what we have learned and always pass it on to others because we believe that everybody who is converted is hungry for the Word of God and we know that everybody needs the Word of God converted or not. So we pray to be good stewards of whatever information we learn about your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joshua

Will you join me in prayer please?

We ask, Father, for wisdom to be able to appreciate what is in your Word, to gain from thinking about Joshua, Judges, and Ruth and to put together as much as we can that will help our minds grasp the significance of this block of material in your Word. What we would love to have happen is that we become better servants of others as we serve you, using this kind of knowledge, this insight, this material that you have provided for all of us in a way that is really helpful and practical. We ask that for Christ's sake, Amen.

I. How God Sees History - Redemptive History

We are going to look at the beginning of what are often called the historical books tonight. That is Joshua, Judges, and Ruth and in so doing I want to be sure that the big picture is as clearly as possible before you. What do I mean by the big picture? I mean really the overview of how the Bible looks at the progress of history. This is knowable; there is not some mystery about this. Many, many books have been written on it, the biblical view of history. Many times when you read books on the prophets you can see this basic schema laid out for you. Anybody who has ever written on redemptive history, that is a terminology that is sometimes employed. Usually if they have written on redemptive history they have provided something like this. It is a way of asking and answering the question, what are the basic stages in the progress of God's relating to people? Some of you know there is also a view called dispensationalism. It is not a view that I hold but dispensationalism has a wisdom in it that comes from its ability to say there is a progress, there is a way in which you have some developments and some changes and you can speak of the great epochs of history according to dispensations. The weakness of the view, in my opinion, is that it over-defines what happens in those epochs so that it tends to say this kind of ethical responsibility is appropriate only to this dispensation and then it all changes and so on. It is an over-definition of what is going on but there really are epochs and this is my attempt to simplify what you can find in, say Geerhardus Vos' book on the history of redemption (*Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* by Geerhardus Vos) or whatever. It is just a simplification. You know well every simplification has its risks because the simpler, the greater the level of potential distortion. We all understand that. But simplification also has its benefits. If somebody simplifies it for you, you at least can get the concept in some form and go from there. I am always a believer, you know, you have seen me do it, I love lists because I think lists for students when the material is pouring at you, lists are great. They are very helpful; they organize the material for you. Simplification is what you need. You do not need every qualification, every possible caveat, every footnote that would explain the nuances. No, especially in a survey course, this is the kind of thing you want to get. By the way, I am actually following an approach that a great learning theorist named Jerome Brunner came up with. Brunner was very influential especially for the following statement, which made him kind of famous. He is a learning theorist who taught at Harvard for many years. He said, "Any person can learn any concept at any age in some form." It is a little bit of an exaggeration. The average two-week old baby probably is just not going to let you know whether or not he or she gets the concept. Of course in itself it is a kind of a simplification of an idea. But what Brunner was arguing was this in effect. Here is how it would work out in our case. Do not ever think you cannot tell a kindergartener about how Christ died on the cross and yet there are all kinds of curricular materials that are put out by major Christian publishing houses who have got an advisory board saying, "We'll introduce the crucifixion when they are in seventh grade." The basics of the gospel will be hidden from little kids because they are too young to comprehend it; it will just scare them or something. "Let's not mention the blood of Christ until they are at least nineteen or whatever and they have already cut their finger." Brunner would say that is silly. Even a kid who is just learning to talk can talk about the greatest of the concepts. Do not ever say, "We must dumb it down because of age. We must prevent it from being

exposed to the children because they are only children." You do not do that. But, you have to be very careful how you house the concepts. So, his point is, anybody any age, any concept in some form, and it is the form that is everything. Here is my form, which I admit is a simplification.

A. The creation and prehistory, really a block of material. We have talked about that, how everything in history down to 2000 B.C. is just summarized very rapidly in those chapters.

B. Then it slows down with a patriarchal dialogue and you get a very important chunk of material: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and Joseph's brothers.

C. Then a third major epoch and this is, notice, creation. We are talking about a second kind of creation, if you want to think of it that way, but the better way to think of it is a continuation of creation. The vocabulary for creation in the Scripture just does not stop in the early chapters of Genesis, it just does not, it keeps rolling right along and you get creation vocabulary just right through. There is lots of it in connection with the time period that we would call Exodus and Sinai.

D. The part that we are going to start looking at today I have titled "Israel Under Blessing" because in the Old Testament there is a blessing-curse-blessing scheme that is very big and very prominent. It is in Deuteronomy, it is in Exodus, Leviticus, it is all over the place, in the prophets, it is in some other places as well like Lamentations. It is really a very prominent theme. It is in Ezra, Nehemiah, in a big way, blessing, curse, blessing. What does that mean? First, when the Israelites are made a nation by God they have got a covenant. That is what happens at Sinai, they get a covenant. What is the deal on the covenant? "You will be my people, I'll be your God. You'll keep my covenant and I will just bless you and bless you and bless you. And remember this promise, if I have to I'll punish you but I would like to bless you for thousands of generations." Just on and on and on. That is the basic idea, "I'll bless you." So God mercifully does bless the Israelites and he does so for hundreds and hundreds of years while they live in the Promised Land. The beginning of that blessing is what we will see in the book of Joshua. Do the Israelites, in fact, violate God's covenant? Sure, they keep doing it generation after generation. There are exceptions, but sadly even in Joshua's own generation, which was one of the better ones, they are still violating the covenant in various ways. We will talk about that tonight. Then eventually they become worse than the people that they drove out. A thing that we have not yet come to but I will just finish off the pattern is that then according to the covenant (it is right there in Deuteronomy 28-32 and Leviticus 26 and so on) God will punish his people if they break his covenant. And eventually they break it so much, so often, so constantly, in every conceivable way that he finally says, "That is it. I have been patient with you. I am long suffering. I am not quick to anger but that's it."

E. Then comes what we call the curse, which is in fact especially centered in the exile. We will come to that business of the exile and we will talk about it but that is what we are dealing with.

F. After the exile there comes the restoration. It is a new period of blessing and, furthermore, it is also a new period of creation. So there is much language in the New Testament about the new creation. They are not getting it out of the blue; they are just picking it up from the Old Testament prophets and carrying it on. It is just consistency with what the Old Testament itself predicts. This view of history is an Old Testament view but it is also a New Testament view. Everything you need to comprehend it is right in the Old Testament, but it is also reflected in the New Testament as well. In the New Testament when Paul talks about the fact that he is living in the latter days, he is talking about the fact that this is stage six. We have had it. All the others have come and gone, we are now in the period of restoration blessing, the era of new creation. There is not some set of epochs to come after this. Next thing that happens is that we have the return of Christ, the judgment, the transformation of heaven and earth, and eternal life breaks out in full. There is not some new thing, not going to get any more law, not going to get any more scripture, not going to get any more anything. Since that time, since 27 A.D. when Christ died and was resurrected, everybody who has lived has been living in the last days. It was the last days as of 27 A.D.; it is the last days now. Why should it take so long? The answer is every hour that goes by people become believers and get to

have eternal life with us. Who would want to say, "Cut that off God, stop that, there is enough people in heaven already? I'm in." No, God who enjoys seeing people saved and come to eternal life is constantly letting them in. That is a great thing. So every year that Christ waits is a year when more people experience God's love and joy, so it is perfectly understandable. Maybe it will go for twenty thousand more years, who knows. But Christ could return before I finish my sent---. No, he didn't. It would be good if he had, but he didn't. It is just a big picture. It is really the whole scheme of the way the Bible develops. Is there overlap? Sure there is. It is not as if you say, "Woe! That is Genesis 50, we had a total change." No, there is plenty of overlap, these things are influencing and falling into one another. Are there continuities from number one to number six? Sure. So do not overdo the thing as I think dispensationalism has tended to do. Do not chop it up so that it is so discrete it is not fluid. In general, can you see references made at various places in Scripture to these things? The answer is yes you can. Knowing that basic overview will help you understand. Even some of the things Jesus says, when he says, for example, "Before Abraham was I am." He is making a point about his being there even before all of the things that come with the patriarchs. He is back early on in creation. When John, in the beginning of the gospel of John, writes his prologue and says, "The Word was with God and the Word was God in the beginning." He has taken the whole identity of Christ right back to creation. He is doing the same thing in various other ways in his prologue also. John the Baptist is quoted as saying, "The one who comes after me was before me." It is just another way of saying Christ bridges all these epochs and all these general categorizations of biblical history. Tonight, in particular, we are going to deal with the conquest of Canaan and its aftermath. We look at Joshua and Judges and something that happens during the days of the Judges, that is the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth is a special focus on events in one location and really one family that correlates very closely with the book of Judges and that is the reason for the book of Ruth's location in the English Bible, at least, right after the book of Judges. That is what we are going to do tonight.

II. Structure of Joshua

A. This just gives us a little bit of a feel for the way that the conquest of the Promised Land actually operated. If one examines this you can see what I will also refer to shortly. The Israelites are over here and they are in northern Moab. The Israelites are in northern Moab and they are ready to enter the Promised Land. They have already captured, as you know from your brilliant analytical, careful reading of the Book of Judges, certain territory over here on this eastern side of the Jordan River that is often called the Transjordan. You will see that terminology employed. Now Moses preaches to them the Book of Deuteronomy right from the plains of Moab and then Joshua leads them across. They get across the Jordan and they come to a little place called Gilgal. It was not a big population center or anything; it was just a little area. There they set up some stones as a special testimony that God had brought them across the Jordan miraculously. There they gathered and worshiped and so on, and from there they then went and attacked Jericho, which is right near by. Jericho is right down in the Jordan Valley, you can get to it easily, it is not complicated, you do not have to have any form of hiking shoes or anything, you just walk there from Gilgal. But because of that vulnerability, Jericho had often been attacked. Over the years Jericho had been a place where many different people had, when invading the Promised Land, sought to attack and establish what we call a beachhead sometimes. So Jericho had also then developed a huge wall complex as a way of protecting itself. It's down in the Jordan Valley, basically pretty accessible, easy to get to, long history of attack, so huge walls. Yet the Israelites do succeed by God's special help. Then you can see they go through the central hill country here and have what we would call just a central campaign. Then they go south. After they have gone south, I will talk more about this and elaborate on it, they turn around and partly retrace their steps but then go way up north, mostly along the Jordan River Valley but have several important campaigns in the north. So it is central, then it is southern, then it is northern. The usefulness of this is just simply that that is a rough, general outline of what you have in the book of Joshua and it sets up for you some things that take place during the days of the judges. If you can get that picture, coming in, attacking Jericho, from there doing a campaign in the central hill country, then going south, then going north, basic pattern over the period of time that is twenty or more years. It is a little hard to tell exactly how many years are involved that constitutes the first ten and a half chapters of the

book of Joshua. Now, let me give an outline of Joshua to you in a little more detail than what I have just done, because I hardly gave you any at all, and make some points about what is going on here. This is a story about how a group of former slaves, people who formed themselves at God's command into an army but had never been an army. They began to think we are an army. They began to encamp by divisions. The term *divisions* is used. Each of the tribes thought of itself as a *division* of an army. So together twelve divisions formed an army. That is not unusual at all. They used the term division in that connection, but they are former slaves. They are former slaves who become something very special. They invade and they possess a territory that had long ago been promised them. We made reference to Genesis 15 previously, but it would not hurt for you at some point to look back and see that. It is a very important passage where God says to Abraham, "Your descendents are going to come here and occupy this land, but they can't do it yet because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." So God was watching that Amorite culture become corrupt and corrupt and corrupt. He was seeing it. He was being patient like he was later with Israel. But eventually their corruption reached the point where even an extremely patient, generous God would have to say, "That's it. It's enough. These people are going to be eliminated as a people. I'm going to give their land to somebody else." Later, he will do the same thing to the Israelites and the prophets will say this. They will say, "You are as bad or worse as the Amorites, that is why it is happening says the Lord." They do not deserve the land, they should not be there, it was not their land in the first place but it is the land that God promised them and they do not earn it but they accept it from God as a gift that he is making to them in fulfillment of a promise. If you get that, you see there are many parallels to our own situation. We are people who have been promised a land. We have not been there yet. Have we earned it? Of course not, but it is ready for us. We do not have to get anybody out of it who is iniquitous, that is the nice thing about it. But rather, it will be a wonderful, eternal place to live and all the better than the original land of Canaan but the parallels are very substantial. It is a land inherited by people who do not have the qualifications and yet have been brought together by God and formed into a people and so on. If you look at the way things work in the first eleven and a half chapters or so or ten and a half depending on how you want to think of it, you have basically the conquest and then basically the allotment. Then there is a bit of an epilogue. Thus Joshua has, essentially, a bifid structure. I have talked about that before, I will talk about it again because roughly half the books in the Old Testament have a bifid structure and it is just nice to know that, it is helpful to see it. It is a style of organization of literature in the ancient world and people put a lot of books together in this way. Joshua stands out because you read all kinds of interesting things up through chapter 11, really the first part of 11, then thereafter it is some of the most boring reading in all literature. You need to know that because most people are not going to be turned on by this kind of biblical material. "The northern boundary started from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan and went up to Beth Hoglah and continued north of Beth Arabah to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. The boundary then went up to Debir from the Valley of Achor and turned north to Gilgal, which faces the Pass of Adummim south of the gorge. It continued along the waters of En Shemesh and came out at En Rogel." Very few people are going to say, "Ah ha, my life verse!" It's just not going to happen. It is not fun reading. It is chapter after chapter of boundary descriptions. You say, "What's going on here? Why does God spend so much time doing it?" The answer is a lot of things are not great reading but they sure are precious. You get someday to buy a piece of property that you have always dreamed of buying or something and the deed is not great reading but, boy, is it nice to have the deed. That is what this is like. Read down through your medical tests that say normal, normal, normal, it is kind of boring, the same word used constantly but it is awfully nice. There are a lot of things that are not exciting reading but are wonderful truth. That is what this is. For these Israelites to get this land is a fabulous thing but they do have to get it by conquest. They cannot just walk in, filter in, arrive, and claim it; they have got to win it. That is genuinely important. We observe that chapters 1 to 8 describe the entry campaign and then we observe that chapters 9 and 10 only, just two chapters, describe the southern campaign, which was actually more extensive than the central entry campaign, but I will talk about that further. Then note that chapter 11 describes the northern campaign, a single chapter for that one campaign.

B. Then there is kind of a wrap-up list of conquered kings and conquered land. Then the allotment descriptions. Important here is the fact that there it is mentioned that there were very large areas of land that were not conquered. You need to spot that. It is very easy when reading through the book of Judges to read about, "Then they attacked that city and they conquered and they did this and the burned it and they did this and they went up here, the Lord gave them into the hand" It is very positive and it should be positive. It was just a remarkable supernatural set of events. But, you can miss the fact that the inspired writer is saying, "On the other hand, don't get a misimpression that we actually drove out all of our enemies." Of course, you have to ask the question why and I will come back to that. There are important qualifications given. You also have after the allotment of the land part of the deal special towns for accidental killers, special towns for Levites, then a list of tribal squabbles, then Joshua's covenant challenges at the end of his life--will you stay faithful, please stay faithful, I challenge you to stay faithful, my household and I will stay faithful. Will you? Trying to get the people to establish a pattern of continuing to be faithful to the Lord. Sadly, as we will see, they abandon that pattern pretty fast.

III. Last Chapters of Joshua

I actually want to start talking about these things at the end of the book and then go back and talk about some things at the beginning.

A. In chapter 20, God sets aside special towns for accidental killers. You might say, "How am I ever going to do a Bible study on that, how am I ever going to teach on that?" If I go make a hospital visit, I am going to read to them and I say, "I know you're facing surgery tomorrow so I would like to read this list of towns for accidental killers." No, here is the deal. This is a culture breaker that in some ways is quite exemplary for us.

B. God is regularly a culture breaker. He does not let corrupt human culture stop him from doing special things. He does a lot of things differently from the way it would be done. In the ancient world, for example, it was absolutely standard for a woman to leave her family and when she got married she would arrive at the home of her husband and live there. So if you were a woman in ancient Israel, ancient Moab, ancient anywhere, you would leave your family where you had grown up and you would go move in with your husband's family. In most cases he would not be building a new house, in some cases he would. But even if he did he was building it on his family's land. So generally you went and left. If you are a man growing up; however, you know someday when you get married you will still live right here, you will still live with your family. That is the standard of the whole ancient world as far as we know. Yet, how does God give the commandment about marriage? He says, "Therefore, a man shall leave his mother and father and go be joined with his wife." God words it the opposite to be sure that the men do not miss the fact that they too must leave that family. Even if they do not leave the land or the house, they must leave the family and they must "cling" or "grab on" to their spouse. This is a new family, a new one-flesh arrangement; you do not just let the family of origin dominate. That is a culture busting way of saying something about marriage. There are many other things. It was the practice in the ancient world for the oldest son to be the heir of most things. Do we read in Numbers about the daughters of the Zelophehad who say, "Wait a minute, this won't work in our case." Moses says, "I'll bring it to the Lord." God says, "They're right." We have got to have provision to be a holy nation for situations in which it does not work for the women to be protected fully and equally by the inheritance system that passes stuff on to the sons. When there are any dangers that prevent that from happening, there has to be another way of handling it. That is culture busting. When the oldest son is normally the one chosen yet someone like King David is chosen who is the youngest son, that is culture busting. Or when Joseph turns out to be the most prominent of all the children of Jacob and he is next to youngest, again it is counter cultural. Or, for that matter, Jacob is the younger son, it is counter cultural. For that matter, Abraham is not the oldest son, it is counter cultural. You have lots of things in Scripture where the strong, usual, typical cultural expectations are just overturned by God because he has a different set of values from what a culture has. Does that mean that he cannot work with a culture? No. Does that mean that he invites us to be defiant of our culture in every possible way? No, but it means that when important necessities come you do not let culture

determine it. In this particular case the culture believe this--that there was an obligation to take vengeance when blood was shed. It could happen anyway. If somebody ran over your grandmother because they were driving their chariot too wildly, in the whole ancient near east as far as we know, you would then feel an obligation. That person took the life of my grandmother. It does not matter if it is an accident, it does not matter if it was on purpose. That person took my grandmother's life. I am going to take his life or, depending, his grandmother's life. But they would see the need to have some kind of retribution. You shed blood; you are going to have your blood shed somehow. So families would go after families. This has continued to this very day and it is a very big part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. You may say, "Aw, not modern Arabs." Absolutely. We have in our church in Boxford where I pastor a person who came from Lebanon. He is now a lawyer and a permanent resident of the U.S. but he said there are whole villages in Lebanon that have just been wiped out by the blood feuds. Family x feels an obligation, and once it happens, once you go after their blood, they then say, "Wait a minute, they took the life of my sister-in-law because we ran over their grandmother, okay I'll get their sister-in-law." And it is back and forth. After a while it is only a question of time and strategy as to when the next hit takes place. Whole villages just decimated because the blood feud principle, alive and well, currently right now in the Middle East. It is a powerful thing. It is part of the culture. God says to the Israelites, "No! You are not going to do that. I have got a system now where certain cities that are among the special towns for the Levites. These special towns are among the Levitical cities. I'll have three of them in the Transjordan and three of them in the Cisjordan, that is west of the Jordan. They will be north and central and south. If you will look at where those are located you will see that it is spread out. Those cities will be for people who have accidentally killed someone. They will flee there and they will live there until the death of the high priest, in other words a very indeterminate time that is in the hands of God. The idea is that so much time will go by they will be untouchable where they are there, because the Levites who run the cities will be obligated to protect them and allow no one in to take vengeance. So those were the ancient equivalent of cities with metal detectors at every gate. They were disarmed cities run by the clergy. The system was then that if you ran there you stayed an indefinite period of time. Everything could cool down, no one could touch you. The hope is that after that indefinite period of time you would be able to go back, but if you were still in danger you would also have lived there so long you would be essentially resettled and if you had to stay you could stay and your life would be protected. It is a very interesting little detail. It is something you might, kind of, zip by in your reading but it is a part of the way that this promised land and the people in it are not just to be one more nation. It is not just one more people group occupying one more territory. The Israelites are to be a holy people. They are to be different. They are to be special. They are to be people who reflect who God is and act like and live like and think like people who are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Do they do it very well? Unfortunately no, but the assignment is real clear even down to breaking one of the most basic habits in the ancient near east and sadly the modern near east that of the blood feud. One sees the tendency to squabble in the last part of the strictly historical narrative portion of this book with the tribal squabbles. You find fighting going on among the tribes in Joshua 22. They are making various accusations back and forth against each other. Some people said we fought more than others. Some people said we have a right to do what we have done. They are mad, they are alleging that there is a breaking of faith and so it is a whole deal that requires real intervention and diplomacy and Phinehas the priest has to get involved deeply in the whole process to make sure that kind of arbitration takes place and so on and they conclude the chapter setting up an altar that says, "The Witness Between Us that the Lord is God" is the name of that altar. In other words, a witness between us is literally that. Somebody will say, "Watch out. Don't fight each other." Then the book ends with Joshua urging the people to recognize that they have got to honor God, they have got to be obedient to him.

IV. Covenant Renewal

What you really have then is covenant renewal. What is covenant renewal? It is the same thing you have in Deuteronomy. The first covenant is given at Mount Sinai. It is the Sinai Covenant. It is from Exodus 20 to the end of Leviticus, great big covenant. It gets renewed forty years later in Deuteronomy. New generation, new group of

people and they have to make it their decision. You cannot inherit covenant obedience. You cannot say, "My parents obeyed the covenant, therefore I am. They were right with God, therefore I am." You cannot inherit that anymore than we who are Evangelicals would say you can inherit salvation. Each person has to make a decision to accept Christ as Savior. You cannot say, "Since my parents did it and I grew up in their home I'm okay." That has been a hallmark of Evangelical theology always that every individual must for himself make that formal decision to follow Christ. You never can ease into it. You cannot say, "I was catechized into it, I went through a process, it is okay. A pastor approved of the process, so therefore I'm going to heaven." No, none of that. It is really what separates, in a very huge way, Evangelicals from all other groups because the Evangelicals will say, "Nobody is in God's kingdom who doesn't accept it in faith like a child and believe that Christ died in his place on the cross and confess sins and repent and be baptized and so on." Everybody has to do that individually so it is a very big thing. Joshua is basically paralleling that by saying, "Yes, there was a generation that renewed the covenant in the plains of Moab before they entered the Promised Land but now decades have gone by, we've conquered the Promised Land, I'm an old guy and I'm calling to all of you before I die to renew the covenant once again so that as a different generation you will (now it is corporate, it is not individual, but the individuals participate), you all as you are individual members of this corporate identity will in fact also agree to the covenant. You have got to make it your own. You have got to do it." He warns them like crazy, be careful, watch out, it is dangerous, it is hard.

A. He says, for example, in Joshua 24:14, "Fear the Lord, serve him with all faithfulness," then listen to what he says, "throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose whom you are going to serve. Whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my family, we're going to serve the Lord." Notice what he is saying. "You want to do this? Get rid of those idols. Get rid of your faith in other gods." He is talking to people for whom the attractions of idolatry were very powerful. People for whom it is so natural to practice idolatry. People for whom it was just hard to believe that one god could do all the things that needed doing in the universe. "One god, really?" So he says to them, "I want you to serve the Lord and if you are going to do it, it is exclusive." If you preach and teach this, I hope you will point out to people the parallels because it is the same today. When Jesus preaches about following him, he is constantly using exclusivity language. "You can't serve God and money, it won't work, don't do it, you'll love one or the other." "Let the dead bury their dead. Are you going to follow me or not?" "I don't have any place to lay my head, you wanna come?" He is constantly talking about exclusive obedience, exclusive following. He is the Lord and his values will be your values. What he wants done is what you will do. His priorities will be your priorities and so on. That is very parallel; there is nothing different about that. When Christ calls each of us to follow him, it is comparable to this kind of challenge from Joshua.

B. Now the people then say, this is Joshua 24:16. "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord and serve other gods. The Lord brought us out of Egypt; the Lord brought us out of slavery. He is the one who protected us. The Lord drove out the Amorites. We're going to serve the Lord." Joshua says in verse 19, "You can't do it." Now this is not because Joshua actually believes they cannot do it but it is classic near eastern style. It is classic style of challenge. We talked before about the so-called false eastern humility, "I am unworthy, I am this or that." You really do not believe you are the worst of all possible people but you say it that way hoping that someone else will say, "Oh, no you aren't." It is a little like the teenager, "Aw, Mom, I look ugly." "No you don't dear, you're beautiful." "No I'm not, I look crumbly." "No you're the nicest kid in your class." "Really, you think so?" It is a little like that. In this case it is another kind of bargaining. Joshua says, "You can't. He is a holy God, a jealous God. He will not forgive rebellion and sin. If you forsake him and serve foreign gods he will turn, bring disaster on you, make an end of you after he has been good to you." The people say, "No we won't" The challenge is obvious. "No, we are taking the challenge. We understand how you are using this bargaining style." Joshua said, "Okay. You are witnesses against yourselves that you've chosen to serve the Lord." "Yes we are."

C. Then he says in verse 23, "Okay, throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord." For that generation, for his own generation, they still had lots of people there, still thinking

polytheistically, still thinking pantheistically, everything is somehow partaking of divinity; all aspects of nature are a god or a reflection of a god in some way and not thinking about there being a true God that is separate from his creation and not thinking about there being only one and so on. The ancient people were polytheistic, pantheistic and also syncretistic. They tended to believe in all kinds of beliefs. The more they knew the better. If you met somebody and you began talking theology with them and you said, "I worship the God that helps motor scooters get started in the morning." They would say, "Really, what is the name of that god?" "Well, it's called putt-putt." "Oh, really. Well I would like to worship him. Which shrine is his?" "He has a shrine over there." You might say, "Maybe I'll need that god's help someday, I have a motor scooter," so you make an offering to that god. That is syncretism where you put beliefs together. The Israelites in this chapter, Joshua 24, are not saying, "We don't believe in Yahweh. Nobody says that. They all believe in Yahweh. The only question was did their belief involve exclusivity or were they syncretistic believers? Did they say, "Well, yeah. Yahweh is our national God, but we also have a personal god and a family god and this god and that goddess," and so on. Joshua is saying, "No, you can only have one. If you want to follow Yahweh, one god, invisible, no idols, etc.," and basically takes them through the practical implications of the Ten Commandments. That is the covenant renewal that ends this book. Did they follow through? We will see how poorly they followed through as then the inspired writer brings us into the book of Judges and describes the problems and exceptions so that you realize that the hopes and dreams Joshua had for the people did not last terribly long.

V. General Conquest Pattern

Having said that let me go back and talk a little bit about the beginning parts of the book. What I would like to do, actually, is use yet another overhead just to emphasize how specially structured these first eleven chapters are.

A. Notice the cities that are actually mentioned as related to the central campaign in chapters 1 to 8, three cities. Gilgal is not a city. It is just the place they land when they get across the Jordan. They capture it but it is an area. Then they capture three cities, Jericho; Ai, after lots of problems and we will come back to that; and then Shechem. That is it. Eight chapters devoted to three cities and an initial beachhead area.

B. Then look at the substantial list, it is twice as long, that is described in just chapters 9 and 10: Gibeon, Beth Horon, Makkedah, Libnah, Gath, and so on. These are all over the place; this is quite a range of places in the southern campaign.

C. Then one chapter only for the northern campaign with huge coalitions. So you have then, cities, states, gathering together, banding together, forming defensive groups so that Joshua cannot pick them off one by one. He has to now fight a whole group at a time; he has to fight coalitions. That is a whole different ballgame. That really was the largest area and largest number of complicated battles of any of them yet it is covered in only one chapter.

What is going on? Clearly, when I say clearly it does not mean that it is absolutely open and shut but I think it is clear, I think that we are supposed to get the point that something is special about these first eight chapters. Most of the energy of the inspired author goes in the description of that relatively small, initial-entry central campaign. It looks like the inspired writer, it could be Joshua who wrote it but it could be somebody else, you cannot tell, it appears to be written very soon after the conquest is over but there is nothing in the book that says Joshua wrote it so we cannot ever be authoritative, but whoever wrote it, Joshua or somebody close to him or somebody right around that time, it looks like that person said, "I'm going really lay out the basic conceptual pattern here and really discuss it during the initial campaign and after that I am just going to basically wrap up the other campaigns very quickly and then talk about how the land was distributed." If you want to get a feel for what happens, good and bad, in the book of Joshua, it is really those first eight chapters that will give you the details and the rest of it is going to come in another kind of fashion. What do we find in the details? We find basically three things. First, they conquer Jericho without any help from humans and with total combat from God and then they

cannot capture Ai at all, even though it is a dinky little place, then they have success and capture Shechem again. It is a very interesting situation.

Holy War

What I need to do at this point is talk about holy war and this is now an attempt to fill you in on the concept of war in the Old Testament. The *locus classicus*, the main central most important place to read about this is Deuteronomy 20, but it is not the only place. However, you will get a good overview of it in Deuteronomy 20.

I. Eleven Characteristics

There are eleven characteristics of holy war. Another one of my lists, but I think you will like it.

A. First of all it was fought with no standing army. This is very clear. The Israelites did not have a standing army at all. That comes out in Deuteronomy 20 where the law is given that when the army gathers the commanders are to say, "Does anybody not want to fight. Anybody got married recently? They can go home. Anybody bought a piece of land recently? They can go home." There are all kinds of excuses. It is not a standing army, it is a pure volunteer operation and it is supposed to be people who really want to serve the Lord.

B. Then there is no pay for soldiers.

C. And no personal spoil or plunder. There has always been some way to pay armies in the history of humanity and most armies get some pay for enlisting and some pay for serving and then many, many armies in history, certainly all the ones we know about in the ancient world, were also given incentive pay. This incentive pay was in the form of plunder. This exists even up to modern times, very recent times, but the idea is this--if you are successful in battle, you may take and keep whatever you can carry off. Whatever it is-- anything. If you can round up a bunch of people and take them as your slaves or wives or anything, you can do it. If you can find a lot of money you can take it and keep it and be rich. If you can find any animals or other possessions, anything you can gather up you can take and keep. So it is a tremendous incentive system. If people fight hard and win they can become instantly rich. It may well be that that person who was very intellectually capable and studied hard, got into seminary and then went on for further study perhaps, or whatever, but was not the greatest fighter would not fair well under this system. But somebody who said, "You want a fight, I'm ready," could really turn out to be quite a successful leader in the community with all those assets that had come because he said, "I don't like you." POW! It really was an interesting incentive system. This all eliminated for the Israelites. Read about it in Deuteronomy 20 and elsewhere. You cannot take any plunder. "It is all mine," says the Lord, "you've got to destroy it, you've got to eliminate it. You can't take anything for yourself, you're not allowed to. That's not what you're doing."

D. Furthermore, one could undertake this kind of war only for the conquest and defense of the Promised Land. You could not generally do it; it was not broadly allowed. You could not say, "We want a war," for whatever purpose. No. The only legitimate war in the Bible is war for the taking and holding of the Promised Land. That is the idea.

E. Furthermore, it cannot happen because a king says, "I want to go to battle." A king has no right to declare war. Moses cannot declare war, per say, it has to come from God.

F. And it has to come through a prophet. It is not a democratic thing where the nation can get together and take a vote and agree that we are going to battle or any tribe can decide or majority of tribes. No, it has to be revealed by the Lord, it is his war. It has to be announced by a prophet, not a priest, not a king, not a counsel.

G. And, very importantly, Yahweh does the real fighting. This is terribly important in the concept. The idea is that you as part of the Israelite army, and all the Israelites are an army; you certainly do indeed go through the motions. You arm yourself and you get out there and you yell things and so on, but basically it is God who does the fighting. This is expressed in many different ways. For example, in Judges 5 the Song of Deborah. Deborah puts it

this way when she is talking about fighting a coalition of northern city-states under a general name Sisera. She says, "The stars fought against Sisera." It is her way of saying it was a heavenly war. You need to have God do the fighting. In the New Testament when Paul picks up the concept of holy war and uses it, he picks it primarily from a certain spot in Isaiah in terms of his direct vocabulary dependence and so on, in Ephesians and talks about what we call spiritual warfare. How does he say it? He says, "Look, don't be naive. The battle is not a matter of fighting flesh and blood so that if you defeat people somehow God's kingdom advances, this is a great spiritual battle on a different plain." He said, "This is a matter of principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places." So he says, "You got to arm yourself with God's armor." What people often misunderstand is this is my armor now. No, that is not what Paul says. Paul was following Isaiah who says, "God has on the breastplate of truth and the sword of righteousness and so on." In other words, you arm yourself by standing behind God and say, "Okay, I'm following, you fight." That is the way it works. Do not think you can defeat principalities and powers, you cannot. God defeats them for you. You just be faithful to God. So the whole concept of "spiritual warfare" has often been twisted in our day from what it was in Old Testament and even, I think, in the way that Paul tells it. It is a funny phenomenon. Yahweh does the fighting. He does the real fighting; the rest of it is going through the motions. Sure, do you put the defeated enemy to the sword? Do you eliminate the plunder and so on and burn everything? Sure, there are things that the troops do, they do not just stand there and say, "I'm imagining this." Of course they do not do that, but the essential fighting; the real victory is not theirs. They could not even do it. They are not strong enough, powerful enough, clever enough, trained enough to do it. It is Yahweh who makes it happen.

H. And it is therefore a religious undertaking. So self-denial including fasting is a big part of the deal. When you read ahead into 1 Samuel as many of you will be starting to do later this week or next, you will read about Jonathan and the Israelites are fighting a holy war with Saul leading it. It does not make a big issue about the fact that it is a holy war; it is just assumed that of course that is what the Israelites are doing. And Saul has declared a fast but Jonathan does not hear about it so Jonathan eats some honey because he is very hungry and when he eats the honey it is a big fuss because, "Hey! A crown prince is not keeping the fast. Here we are denying ourselves, the crown prince isn't." It is a big source of fuss but it is a demonstration of the fact that they were taking seriously the holy war including the self-denial aspect of fasting. By the way, in Scripture fasting is never an end in itself. You could fast for health reasons or something but it is never an end in itself. Fasting is always a prayer intensifier. That is what fasting is. Without going into all the details of how and so, that is why, that is what it is. You never fast by itself without prayer. Even if you think you will find some place that seems to say that like something in the book of Esther or whatever, it is really a misunderstanding. Fasting is always an intensifier of prayer. It makes a prayer especially urgent, especially significant because there is something about what you are praying about that is especially important to you. When David and his men do what they do even when they are being pursued by Saul, also in 1 Samuel, they are still using self-denial approaches, which is what you are supposed to do in holy war. You may remember that there is a story in 1 Samuel, if you do not remember it, you will come to it. I know some in this class have been taking this as graduates and ThM students so they know this stuff, but if you do not you will come to it. David and his men are very, very hungry; they have been on the run from Saul. They come to a place called Nob and that is where the high priest is at that time, because the tabernacle moved around some. So they come there and "We're terribly hungry," says David, "got any food?" The priest says, "Well, all I've got is the shewbread, we've got plenty of shewbread, the bread that we put out and bake symbolically and offer to God and then the priests eat it. But common people who are not priests can't eat this bread." He says, "Unless of course you've kept yourself from women." In other words if you are on holy war and you are following holy war then you have consecrated yourselves and among the self-denials is no sex. That was among the self-denials. Even in the New Testament Paul says that. "When you fast and pray that is the only time that a couple should not be together physically." He says, "Otherwise, you would be cheating one another." You say, "No I don't think so, not this month." "That is not what Christians do," He says. For fasting and prayer you say yes. You are not going to say, "Let's fast and pray and have sex." No, that somehow does not fit. Paul says, "No way, that won't work." He says, "Unless they have done that." David says, "We always do that." "Okay," He says, "you can have the shewbread." In

other words you are consecrated by holy war just as if you were a priest and consecrated to eat the shewbread. Just little things like that you will find in a lot of places.

I. This is what seems hardest for most people to get--the idea of the total annihilation of the enemy. This seems very brutal. When you read the descriptions, you know, "Spare not a one of them, destroy them all, destroy their animals, burn everything." You say, "Wow, what kind of vicious behavior is this?" You must remember a couple of things. One, it is a war of judgment. God who knows right and wrong quite well has said, "I want to eliminate this Amorite culture." He does not say none of the children can go to heaven under two-years-old. None of that is said. We do not know anything about God's fairness in dealing with those people at that time, under those conditions, but he does say, "Gotta eliminate the culture." Numbers of people have argued it actually was a cleaner kind of war in some ways than much modern warfare. In modern warfare you leave all kinds of kids bereft of their parents and orphaned and so on. Look at the way the United States ran the Vietnam War, and not that it was not for a noble purpose but just so many of the mechanics of the process, defoliating forest and poisoning people in all kinds of ways and on and on and on, and a whole generation affected by that. This war says, "Look, no compromise, this is for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, it is a judgment war, you're my agents of judgment you Israelites, you're an army of people sent by the Judge of all the earth and you're going to do this for me." They saw it that way and accordingly understood that they were to annihilate an evil culture and totally do so. Another wrinkle. We are going to see this in connection with Joshua 7. I know I am not proving this by listing all the references and so on but if you will trust me, and indeed I am your friend. You can trust me on this. I am not giving you anything that is new or weird; I am just summarizing what you can read about in various books and articles on holy war.

J. The violator becomes the enemy. It is like Joshua says in Joshua 24, "You have got to choose now. Are you going to be on my side, the Lord's side or are you going to be on this other side? If so, get out and do it but don't try to pussyfoot in both camps. Do try to say 'Yes I love the Lord and I have a few idols. What's the problem?' You cannot do that." And an Israelite cannot say, "Well, I'll engage in this but I'll just do one, three, and six," or something. No, you have got to keep all these rules. If you want to participate and you want the blessing of God, this thing is an all or nothing deal. "If you do not keep this holy war which is very important to me," says the Lord, "then I will not bless you, you are my enemies. You are declaring yourself on the other side if you don't stand as my agents of judgment." In the newest book that Fee and I are writing together, some of you have read, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, I certainly hope so because I have assigned it, but we are writing yet another book that is tentatively titled *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* and one of the themes that we try to trace right through into the New Testament into the book of Revelation is the theme of holy war. So once that book is out, and I hope it will be out maybe even this Fall or something [published in 2002 by Zondervan], we hope that one of the things people will see as they read through is our advice, "See again," we will say, "there it is, some more holy war stuff." This really is a very prominent theme. It is quite a significant thing. If you know these rules, there will be a lot of little things you will spot. You will understand much more about the book of Ezra, you will understand much more about the book of Esther, you will understand much more about Nehemiah, you will understand much more about several sections in the prophets. You will get the book of Revelation much more clearly and so on. This is a theme that has a lot more applicability than just Joshua.

K. Finally, also, there are exceptions. For example, if people are potentially your enemies but they are not themselves actual inhabitants of the Promised Land you can make different kinds of deals with them. This is for the elimination of a culture that is evil in the Promised Land. If somebody comes from afar and says, "Well, we would fight or we are allies of these Promised Land inhabitants." That is a different deal. You can make all kinds of arrangements with them and it is somewhat *ad hoc*. Now that is what of course is happening in Joshua 9. If you read for today in preparation you read Joshua 9 about how the people of Gibeon understood what was going on with holy war. They had years to learn this, what Joshua describes takes years to work out. So people are learning more and more and finding out more and more about how things fit together and these people of Gibeon say, "We are going to get wiped out, but we know that the Israelites are only after the inhabitants of the Promised Land."

This is very clear. "Why don't we do this? Why don't we pretend we are from a distance, we're not natives and we'll come to them and say we want to make peace with you, then we'll get them to make a peace covenant and these people will keep their word, we believe they will. They are very serious about any kind of covenant." All that is known. Some of that is known because the Israelites are not just conquering territory and then refusing to talk to anybody. Israelites are settling in and talking and gabbing away. Many of them are already settled over in the Transjordan, Gad and part of Manasseh and so on, so they are gabbing away to their neighbors and the word is spreading back and forth, "What do you do with the Israelites and how do you handle them?" And so on. They get this all figured out and they send representatives, pretend that they have traveled a long distance, come to Gilgal where Joshua still is located, that is the headquarters, the original beachhead and we are from a long distance and we want to make a treaty with you. So they do, they make this treaty and work it all out and then basically of course Joshua finds out that they have deceived him and he will not dishonor his word. His word is very important to keep. He did say, "We'll spare their lives." But he did not say he would not say he would not make them workers among the Israelites, forced labor workers. So he says, "Okay, you deceived us, you will now be forced labor workers among us," and they were thereafter. So there are exceptions and mutations possible and you will see that as you go along.

II. Holy War Theme in the New Testament

This is a concept that goes all the way to the book of Revelation. All through Revelation who is Jesus depicted as? Riding a white horse. In Matthew he is on a donkey, in Revelation he is on a white horse. In Matthew he has disciples waving palm branches at him and so on. In Revelation all the saints are behind him on their horses. That is holy war. What is he doing? He is conquering and eliminating evil. And so he has a sword in his hand this time and even a sword coming out of his mouth. You also have the warfare language that Paul uses in Ephesians 6 and if you examine that, that is right in the same ballpark as the warfare language of holy war in Deuteronomy or Joshua. Those would be a couple of examples right away. I do not mean by this that Christians are soldiers first and nothing else. There are a lot of themes in Scripture. We are also peacemakers. We also turn the other cheek. But God is fighting a holy war. What is God doing? He is doing what he always said; he is restoring the blessing and eliminating evil. Part of the function of holy war ultimately is to eliminate not just enemies in the Promised Land but all evil everywhere and the "final enemy" that is mentioned in Revelation, mentioned by Paul is death itself. The final thing to die is death and even in Revelation 20 death is cast into the Lake of Fire. Death, as a process, is destroyed. Those are complex themes that have to be worked out.

III. Significance to the Defeat at Ai

I want to conclude this chunk, actually everything here on Joshua, with Joshua 7 and talk about what happens when somebody does die. It will help, I hope, put the frosting on the cake of the concept of holy war, which is so prominent here in Joshua. Let me draw your attention to chapter 7. I would want to say this, remember how I said before, so much time spent on the first eight chapters and then just almost like an afterthought, "Well yes, there was also a southern campaign and a northern campaign," and just mention the cities. Why? What is going on? I think that everything in the first eight chapters is paradigmatic. We have talked about that with law; I want to talk about that now with narrative. That the inspired author has said, "I'm going to set the scene for you with these eight chapters. I'm going to talk about the basic concepts. I am going to get across what was going on in that block and then you just assume it was also going on in the other materials as well." I believe that that is a strongly arguable position. If you doubt it then you will just have to read the various commentaries on Joshua and see if they do not convince you by how they talk about this same block of material as being programmatic for the rest of the book. Here is what we have in this programmatic section. So far with chapter 6 everything goes well. They take Jericho, they march around the city, the walls fall down, it is fabulous, they march right in, put the people to the sword, and they have won and it is fabulous. Then chapter 7 starts off this way, "But the Israelites acted

unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things." That is a general statement, "the Israelites." It is immediately narrowed down to one particular, most egregious instance but you have got to understand that that statement says a huge amount. The Israelites did not fully obey holy war. Remember what I said, point 11 or 10 or whatever it was, if you violate it, you become the enemy. So if it says the Israelites acted unfaithfully, they are heading toward becoming in God's disfavor rather than his favor. Here is what happens. A guy name Achan, son of Carmi, the son of Zimri and so on, took some devoted things. He took some of the things that should have been burned, destroyed, whatever. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel but I am suggesting to you it was not just this one instance, this is just a detailed story so you get the general idea. It was going on a lot. They tried to fight Ai. Ai is a little, tiny place. Do you know what Ai means in Hebrew? It means ruin. This place was called ruin. So apparently it was some city that once existed and had been destroyed centuries earlier and people were basically living there almost what we would call squatters in the English language. Squatters means people living in less than perfect conditions, to some degree even temporarily in a place not really in ideal, proper conditions. So this city is mostly in ruins, people are living there. The scouts come back. They say, "Don't send all the people, it would be a waist of time. Sent two or three '*elephs*' which I would argue would be two or three companies. It says, end of verse three, "Only a few men are there." It is a small group. So Joshua sends them and it says, "They were routed by the men of Ai who killed about thirty-six of them and chased them away." Look what happens, thirty-six people, you get thousands and thousands of Israelites, in any normal war thirty-six casualties would not be a big deal. That is very acceptable. You know there is an acceptable level of casualties. What do the Israelites do? It says, "The hearts of the people melted like water." Verse 6, "Joshua tore his clothes, fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, stayed there until evening, all the elders did the same, all the leaders did the same and Joshua said," verse 7, "Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?" He is falling apart, the people are falling apart. Thirty-six casualties and they are berserk. Why is that so? Because their expectation was not a casualty. Their expectation was nobody gets killed. You do not lose anybody. It is holy war; God does the real fighting so the only part you have to do is what is safe. That is the idea of holy war. It is that extreme, so when they had a casualty, which is not mentioned anywhere before but that would be one thing to have thirty-six of them, that is real clear, God is not with us. Joshua knows, at least potentially, that we, the Israelites, have become the enemy. We are violators, we have become the enemy. Did you bring us across to kill us? He is afraid of being destroyed because thirty-six people lost in a battle. Every battle is supposed to be a success and nobody is supposed to get killed in the process. It is that extreme. It is very different. It is special. It is something that we are not used to in any warfare that we involve ourselves in. God then says, "The Israelites have disobeyed me, that is why it happened. They've taken devoted things, they've lied, they've stolen, they've put things in with their own possessions," verse 11. "That is why they can't stand against their enemies. They've become liable to destruction." Well, liable to destruction is what the enemy is supposed to be. That is the same terminology used of the enemy, destroy the enemy. Now the Israelites are. "I won't be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction." So what has to happen is, that basically, this guy Achan and his family and all that he possessed have to be destroyed because this was a collusion in which they capture things, he hid them under the tent, the family is involved in that and so on. It is a big fuss and they even name the place where they stone him, especially, and set up a heap of stones there and so on. Then they go and attack Ai and they succeed. From Joshua's point of view it looks like they have lost it all. That is how special the holy war was. That is how particular and different it is from anything that we would normally expect. Soon thereafter, by the way, he actually does an early covenant renewal at the end of chapter 8. He gets them up on Mount Ebal and has copied on stones the Law of Moses. So they actually carve, what presumably are the Ten Commandments at least, if not other things, and Joshua reads (34:8) the words of the law, blessings and curses and it says, "there is not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly, men, women, and the foreign born living among them." He is scared; he is nervous and wants to have the people back. Once they do that covenant renewal, that preliminary covenant renewal, they are back in favor with God, they are recommitted people, and then off they go and accomplish his purposes. Bear in mind that elaborate story in chapter 7. I would say to you that the message of that story is do not think the Israelites were really doing holy

war all the way. Here is one instance and they were able to overcome it by God's grace but there is trouble. These people are not fully obeying holy war and there are significant results going to come from that. Those significant results include the fact that they did not then have the ability fully to conquer the Promised Land. At the end of the book of Joshua, what do you have? By the admission of the book itself, openly and clearly, partial control. There are large pockets where the Israelites are not in control and that is the way the book of Judges opens.

Judges

I. Extent of the Conquest

Again the popular conception of the conquest is that it was totally complete. The Israelites conquered the whole territory and it can seem almost to read that way. Our own Professor Niehaus made a very valuable contribution to this question by helping us understand that the wording, even in the book of Joshua with regard to the statement, "All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered," in Joshua 10:42, has been actually traditionally mistranslated. Here is an illustration of why we ask people in the MDiv program to learn Hebrew. You can believe an argument like this or not but it is hard to follow it without some Hebrew. So if you do not know any Hebrew it is a good argument, I just cannot as easily commend the article to you because it will be harder to follow. But you have this translation, "Joshua conquered all these lands," this is summary now at the end of 10, "in one campaign," "at one time," or "at the same time." Niehaus says none of those is quite right; they are all misleading. The phrase in Hebrew is *pa'am 'ehath*. What does it mean? He wrote an article in the journal *Vetus Testamentum*, that means Old Testament in Latin, and he said the real meaning is "once". In other words a lot of the campaigns that Joshua did were hit and run campaigns. Had the Israelites been faithful, God would have taken care of permanentizing the results of those hit and run campaigns. But as the Israelites were unfaithful God allowed the people who had once lived in those cities and ran away when they saw the Israelites coming to filter back in and reoccupy them. Indeed, that is exactly what we have in the book of Judges. If you carefully compare the book of Judges to the book of Joshua you see that numbers of the places that Joshua conquered are in the hands of Canaanites in the book of Judges. How can this be? The answer is he conquered them once, it does not say all at once, it does not say totally, he conquered them once and once only and moved on and they were reoccupied by the enemy. That is what Niehaus is saying in that article. If you want to read it, it is not a long article, you might find it most interesting and helpful and it really does clue us in on the way that the Scripture is describing things. You do not want to do two things. On the one hand you do not want to be naive and say, "Everything went well for the Israelites, no problems, it was perfect, they conquered the whole Promised Land total rest from enemies, no Canaanites left, total fulfillment of the covenant." You just cannot say that because it is not true. But on the other hand you do not want to say, "Well, it was a disaster. Nothing went right." That is the wrong extreme as well because it was not a disaster, it was wonderful, it was supernatural. A bunch of people who did not deserve anything got all of them settled in the Promised Land. They did unfortunately have their enemies nearby. They had the Canaanites left, as it says in Deuteronomy as, "Thorns in their sides and briars in their eyes." They had plenty of problems to deal with, it had to be worked out over long periods of time and it was not then until David's day that the conquest was actually completed. David, finally, really did subdue every internal hostile power. When David was king, at the end of his reign, there were no Canaanites giving anybody any grief, but it took them until then. But it was still a wonderful, wonderful, successful thing. It was a great gift of God, it was great mercy, and nobody deserved it. It happened and it was filled with miracle story after miracle story and yet it was not complete. So the conquest remained incomplete. Then we pick up with the book of Judges.

II. Orienting Data for Judges

A. This is a book that covers centuries.

1. The centuries are a desperate struggle to hold on to the Promised Land as enemy after enemy tries to take it away.

2. The book looks forward to the kingship so strongly that you have to wonder might it not have been written when the kingship had finally arrived but that is debatable and you can think that through and read what the commentaries have to say.

B. It covers the period of time from the death of Joshua sometime around 1360 BC to the time just after Samuel, maybe around 1060. So it might be as much as a 300-year period, that is one good way to look at it. But before the time of the rise of the monarchy, before David's day, around 1000 BC, all dates are difficult. We have much better data thereafter but all dates are difficult in these time periods.

C. What are the emphases? Decline. The book of Judges is a tragedy. Now it does not mean everything is bad in the book but a tragedy in the sense that it does not move along and progress to a happy ending, it moves downhill and progresses to a sad ending.

1. The decline is on four planes.

a. Military decline, you can see it again and again. You see the first Judges fighting and having victory, the last judge is Samson, he is all alone and he is a weirdo and he ends up having his greatest victory of any kind when he kills himself in the process. That is not the ideal. Militarily the Israelites decline.

b. Spiritually they decline but also religiously and morally. You may say, "What is the difference?" There is a difference. Spiritually they decline in the sense of their actual faithfulness to God, their trust in him, their character of obedience.

c. Religiously they decline because their beliefs fall apart. They actually begin to embody all kinds of wild pagan beliefs in the process.

d. They decline morally because their behavior, just in terms of ethical decency also deteriorates as is seen in the progression of the stories. So the decline is portrayed in all four ways, military, spiritual, religious, and moral.

2. The tenuous results of the conquest are constantly before you in the book of Judges.

3. Furthermore, how the very next generation, after a good one like in Joshua's day, how that very next generation can torpedo right down deep into degeneration. How quickly a revival can fade is another way of thinking about it. One sees this all the time in modern life, you see it all the time in churches, you see it in people. One of the things you have to face, you are a youth worker, you have some kid who comes, he is going to every Bible study, he is on fire for the Lord, he loves it, gets a girlfriend and suddenly he is gone, gets a car, anything, they are gone. You call and say, "What happened?" and they say, "Aw, I'm not interested anymore." "Come on; come on back to the Bible study. Will you pray with me?" "No, see you later, I've got some homework." It is very sad. You will see it in the lives of individuals. It can happen in a church. A church will have good leadership and be going great guns. The pastor will accept a call to another church, of course, one that pays better. You do not accept calls to lower paying churches. Oh, is that not a rule? It is funny how most people manage to find the will of the Lord only in the case of higher pay. We are human. Then a church can decline enormously. It is one of the great dangers of the so-called mega churches. People think the mega church movement is new. In American history there are lots of churches that were mega churches around 1880's and 1890's and other times and they are now apartment buildings or whatever. Why? Because you cannot sustain that kind of large emphasis under normal conditions once there is a transition. Very hard for a church of 30,000 to supplant the pastor with anybody and not have it decline. Almost never fails that way.

4. There is a lack of preservation of values from one generation to another.

5. How low people can sink. That is Judges 19. Real low point in the whole history of Israel remembered by the prophets as the low point of history for the people.

6. Also this wonderful theme, God generously keeping in there and rescuing his people again and again and again; the mercy of God seen when none of it is deserved. They have not done a thing to warrant his mercy and yet he keeps showing it.

7. In addition, what we call charismatic leadership. Not charismatic in the sense that they speak in tongues but charismatic in the sense that they are raised up by God's Spirit, the gift of leadership. Not people who have a right by inheritance or election or anything to be leader of Israel but God says, "That's the person," and God designates and it shows so that people sense it and respond to it. That is biblical leadership really in the ultimate sense aside from the kingship of Christ but with regard to any leadership under him it is still charismatic leadership of exactly that kind. Not inherited, not by any other means but supposed to be recognized by God's people and endorsed because people can tell this is a person of God to follow.

8. The need for a true and good king, big push, it has got to happen eventually.

9. The attractions of idolatry.

10. And the progressive disintegration of Israelite tribal unity. The nation falls apart politically during the days of the judges. By the end of the book, they are fighting each other.

III. Outline of Judges

I want to lead you to an outline of Judges because I do want to show you how the book has been put together. Often, one of the best things you can ever do is just outline a block of material in the Bible, see how the author has put it together. Usually it will give you a feel for what the author's main interests really are. It is hard not to catch a sense if your outlining has been done correctly.

A. You first have emphasis on the military decline and it is described for you in the first chapter and part of the second.

B. Then there is emphasis on the spiritual decline and a lot of things are said about that. If you go back and read it, if you read it for tonight you may recognize this, if you have not read it yet, go back and you will spot it.

C. Then come the judges. The judges are introduced with Othniel in 3:7. Notice that I have underlined some of them - Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. There are twelve judges that are mentioned in the book. Six of them have been called traditionally "major judges," but that is only from the old Latin *judices majores*, which means "the big judges". In other words, the ones that get lengthy descriptions about what they did and who they were. And six judges we call "minor judges." They may have been very prominent in their day, very important, but the descriptions of them are just a verse or two. What is going on? Here is what it looks like. It looks like God inspired the author, once again, to be programmatic in coverage, that is, let some of the stories tell the basic truths and just list the rest of the events and participants. How many tribes were there? Twelve. How many judges were there total? There could have been more than this but God has chosen exactly twelve to be described for us. We know that many of them were rather localized. It is not that these judges ruled over all Israel and no other judges existed when they were judges and that is what the list tells you. For example, Gideon led the people of Manasseh against the Midianites and Amalekites, but he was not leading everybody. Samson was not leading anybody; he was all alone totally. If you carefully check you see that these judges were basically localized. They were meeting localized threats, regional threats within Israel with regional forces that gathered to them as God raised them up and so on. That is the picture. You do not need to tell this twelve times over. If you do it six times, it will do it. You can get the impression quite well from six stories of the nature of the decline and how it goes down hill steadily. You have very good and successful judges with Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah and it begins to deteriorate, Gideon's belief system and Jephthah's behavior and so on and when you come to Samson, behavior is bad, belief is odd and yet God uses him but it is not a happy story at all. He is the longest story; he gets four chapters. If you read that

story carefully, you have to say, "Boy, are things in bad shape for Israel in his day." This judge himself was a Nazirite fooling around with prostitutes and getting himself in all kinds of trouble in various ways. It is very sad.

D. At the end there is a couple of stories of religious disorder. You read about the Israelites going into idolatrous practices and so on.

E. And finally there is moral disorder. They are fighting each other. The behavior is just not even tolerable by any standards, pagan or otherwise. The terrible story in Judges 19 and 20 of how a Levite who just wants a place to stay for the night does not go to Jerusalem, which is still in Canaanite hands, but goes to the town of Gibeah nearby which is in Israelite hands, and they come, a gang, and want to have sex with him and the person he is staying with in desperation sends out two women, they get raped, one of them killed. It is a general horror story of behavior. It is a reminder of Sodom and Gomorrah, right there in heartland territory in a supposedly safe city in central Israel. That is how terrible the decline is. You can get that list from any Bible encyclopedia or dictionary. It is not that you cannot recreate that list. What I would like now to point out is this - there is a pattern that the book of Judges brings to our attention that will be relevant right straight through Israel's history until the exile.

IV. The Deuteronomistic Cycle (Judges 2:7-19)

Here is a pattern for the next almost thousand years. This pattern has been named the Deuteronomistic Cycle because it really is a reflection of what Deuteronomy warns about. It is consistent with, it is in the line of the warnings of Deuteronomy. Moses warns the people, "Look, if you obey God, things will go fine. If you don't, he is going to deliver you to your enemies and you'll be in tough shape, you'll have to cry out for help. Just be thankful that he is a merciful God but a lot will be lost in the meantime." That is what is picked up for us in Judges 2. Here is how it is expressed, "After Joshua dismissed the Israelites," they had taken the Promised Land and everything, "they went to possess the land." It says, this is verse 7, "The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and who had done great things." That whole generation, that was fine. Then it says, "They buried him." Then comes verse 10, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers," in other words after they died, "another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel." In other words, they have a pagan mindset. They grew up in this place that it happened but they are just not thinking the same way. "Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals." The various "lords." Baal means, "lord;" it is one of the words for lord in Canaanite, and Hebrew is a branch of Canaanite. So they served the various lords. They had various kinds of lords, it is all one essential god but he manifests himself in various locations, that is the idea. "They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. Ashtoreth is the same as basically Asherah and that is Baal's girlfriend in that mythology. That is his pagan girlfriend, his fertility companion. (By the way, he is sleeping with his girlfriend, he did not wait until marriage, I just wanted you to know that.) In his anger against Israel the Lord hands them over to raiders who plunder them, sold them to their enemies all around whom they were no longer able to resist. When they went out to fight the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up Judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders but eventually they would not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshipped them, turning away. The Lord would raise up a judge to save them, they would turn away, then they go back in it. Therefore, the Lord would be angry again and so on. You get this cycle.

A. They start out faithful and free.

B. They eventually commit apostasy, that is, turning away from God. Apostasy - leaving, going away.

C. God becomes angry. What does he do? He unleashes their enemies against them. There are lots of people who want this same territory. At any time God wants to, he can just open the door and let them come in. No problem for him.

D. Then they get oppressed.

E. They cry for help and because now they are serious, "Oh, I'm in trouble," they will come back to God.

F. Then he rescues them by raising up a judge who is not primarily a jurist who decides court cases, though the judge would do that as an automatic part of the job, but he is primarily a military deliverer.

G. Then they are faithful and free for a while.

H. But soon enough they return to apostasy. Judges 2 really does describe this whole cycle. This is going to go on rotating generation after generation. You are going to see it all through the stories of the kings. There will not be any case where two kings in a row are good. Sadly, you are not going to have it. It is going to just keep going around and get a good king and he might produce a lot of revival on the part of the people, they will turn their hearts back to God and it will not be long before they apostatize and they are off again into evil. It will happen all through the days of the judges. When there is a king, sadly, it will happen all through the days of the kings. This is the pattern. God knows his people, he knows what to expect, he knows what they are like and it is a pattern that has played itself out on into modern times. Jonathan Edwards chronicles the story of the Great Awakening. He writes this famous history of the great awakening in the 1700s in New England, talks all about the wonderful things that happened, but if you will look at the details and count the numbers you will see that at the end of his ministry when Jonathan Edwards finally retires because he cannot preach anymore there is one fewer person in his church than when he took it. Great boost, great awakening, lots of things happen, lots of influence, but, in fact, it fades out fast. So is the danger of all revivalism. If you think, "Aw man, look at the crowd. Everybody is here. We're gonna have an altar call. We're gonna just straighten this thing out once and for all and our whole community will love God and none of these people will have a sin again." You just cannot have it that way, it does not work. So I want to encourage all of you, whether it is youth work, whether it is counseling, whether it is pastoral ministry, whether it is missions, you hang in there for the long haul because no matter how good it goes at any given time it is going to go down from there and you keep working it back up and you may have other things going up while some are going down but you are not going to get constant, steady, complete, victorious gain on every occasion. It just does not work that way. Most people who do Christian work have to remember what happened to Jesus himself when large numbers of people finally said, "Let's kill him." What happened to Paul who was apparently a competent apostle? They stoned him and tried to kill him in various ways and rejected him and made fun of him and every other thing and defied him and his church just gave him constant grief. You have got to be in it for the long haul and you just cannot say, "I'm waiting for the big break to come and when that comes we are going to sail and climb ever upward." You might be able to do that if you run laundromats but not in God's church because people are people. You have to be aware that generations come and generations go and they really, if you look at the study of revival in modern times, the consequences in various ways may be long lasting but in terms of just people really on fire for Christ it does not last as long as you would like it to. Most times a decade later things are very, very different. It is like in the old song about Chicago, the city that Billy Sunday could not close down. Billy Sunday, a great preacher of the Word of God, had tremendous revivals in Chicago, but once he left town there were plenty of people who said, "That was interesting." It is a danger.

V. Overview of the Final Chapters

There are quite a number of foreign enemies that you begin to encounter when you deal with the book of Judges. You begin to learn about the Philistines. They are not too big a picture in the book of Joshua but they become really big in Judges. They are the main enemy. They are constantly wanting the very same territory that

the Israelites have and they almost get it. In fact, if you follow the progress from the book of Judges through the book of 1 Samuel, at the end of 1 Samuel when Saul is killed on Mount Gilboa the Philistines are three-quarters of the way to the Jordan Valley from where they started along the edge of the Mediterranean. So the Philistines are very successful. But Amalekites bother them, Ammonites, Amorites, Canaanites, Midianites; these are the groups you find. Various kinds of groups at various times rising up against the people, attacking them, giving them grief. It is a cycle; you see it with judge after judge. A lot of these judges are trying to fight holy war, a lot of them are succeeding but gradually their ability to do that diminishes. By the time you hit poor Samson you see someone who is alone and having to do all of his own fighting. If God had not given him special strength he would have been totally ineffective and yet he fritters away his opportunities by his own personal debauchery and so on. That is then followed by the kind of terrible idolatry described in Judges 18 that affects whole tribes. Then by the debauchery in a heartland city like Gibeah in Judges 19 with the rape and murder that occurs there of people who would come asking for shelter. Then the book itself comes to this end. After a great battle that comes as a result of that rape and murder and an attempt to set things right the Israelites have finally defeated the people of Benjamin. Most of the other tribes gang up, form an army, and attack the Benjamites who were defending the terrible people of Gibeah. So finally they defeat the Benjamites. Then they say, "Oh, good grief. We've killed off a lot of people. We also have now eleven-twelfths of our nation." In chapter 21 they are trying to solve this problem. Verse 6, "Today one tribe is cut off from Israel." Verse 7, "How can we provide wives for those who are left since we've taken an oath by the Lord not to give any of our daughters to them in marriage." That was one of the many oaths they took, not supposed to take oaths but they did, and another foolish one. "There has got to be a method to handle this." They said, "Okay, let's go to Jabesh Gilead and kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin." This is a brilliant plan and they carry this out. You can read about it in more detail, I am just summarizing it enormously quickly. Then they decide, "Gee, we've given this oath that we're not going to let them have our daughters as wives, cursed be anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite. But we've got to rebuild the nation of Benjamin, the tribe of Benjamin. We have to rebuild it. Let's do it this way. The Shiloh festival is a great festival where all the women dance, all the unmarried women especially. Thousands come out and there is this big dance of unmarried women. Big, big, festival time. "Let's do this. Let's, of course, not tell the women at Shiloh that we are doing this but we will say to the Benjamites hide in the vineyards and watch," this is verse 21, "when the girls of Shiloh come out to join in the dancing, rush from the vineyards and each of you grab a wife from the girls of Shiloh and take her home to Benjamin." Brilliant tactical advice. "When their fathers or brothers complain to us we will say do us a kindness by helping them because we didn't get wives for them during the war and you're innocent because you didn't give your daughters to them." So that is what they did. The girls are dancing around and then all of a sudden grab and off they go. The book ends with this statement, "At that time, Israel had no king, everyone did as he saw fit," which is a statement saying they needed help. That is not a nice, friendly statement saying, "Weren't they lovely as independent and so on, each person with his own" No, that is a tragic statement.

Ruth

I. Emphases

At the same time now we have the story of Ruth going on. The Judges story is a tragedy; the book of Ruth is not. It is a very happy story. There is a real contrast here.

A. This book, thus, bears witness to God's control of history, because even as bad as things are in one place, that is virtually all of Israel, things can be good in a little place like Bethlehem, a fairly small town, if people are godly there. In other words, you can always be an exception to the rule. That is one of the things the Bible teaches again and again. Sure the culture dominantly is going down the drain, going to hell fast, but you do not have to. That is what you got to do in a youth group; you got to tell the kids, "You don't have to do it." You can say, "I'm going to get my kicks out of being different." It is hard for kids to do, but you can do it. That is part of what you will preach all the time; that is part of what you will do in counseling. You have to say, "Look, everybody else does it, but you don't have to do that. In fact, you're not supposed to do that, you're supposed to be a different kind of person." It bears witness to God's control of history.

B. It confirms what is taught elsewhere in the Bible that God often allows miseries to come to righteous people and that is a very big truth. He also grants blessings to the wicked, by the way, we will talk about that when we talk about the book of Job and some other places. It illustrates what is taught elsewhere.

C. Obedience to God is faithfulness in actions toward others. It is part of it, not all of it, but part of obedience is faithfulness to other people. The way you treat others is part of the way you obey God. It is a great theme in Scripture.

D. In the days of the Judges, a bad time, a few people could be very different. We can be exceptions to what prevails.

E. The human lineage of the Messiah has in it, as would be expected of anyone's lineage, both common and noble strands.

II. Overview of Ruth

Having said that let me draw your attention to what happens in the case of the story as it unfolds. Ruth is a woman from Moab who marries a guy from Israel whose family had come into Moab to try to make a living during a famine. There is a famine in Israel. They leave Israel because the word is there has been more rain in Moab and so on. They travel to Moab, relocate there, a guy named Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons. Naomi in Hebrew happens to mean "sweetie", that is the word Naomi. This guy Elimelech and his wife "sweetie" have a couple of kids. One of the kids gets married to Ruth. Then there comes a time when that kid dies, his brother dies, he was married to a woman named Orpah and Elimelech dies. This leaves Naomi, "sweetie," and her two daughters-in-law on the family compound there in Moab.

A. Now that her husband and sons are gone Naomi says, "I'm going home, I'm going back. Maybe God will be good to me in the land of my ancestors, the land of my birth." Orpah kisses her good-bye but it says, "Ruth hangs onto her." And Ruth says, "Where you go, I'll go. Your people will be my people and your God my God." That is a conversion. That is a statement that in the Old Testament times was the way you said, "I accept your Savior as my Savior. I'm in, I'm with this, I'm going to be an Israelite and I'm gonna believe as an Israelite ought to believe." This suggests that probably Elimelech and his wife Naomi were real witnesses to those daughters-in-law, certainly Naomi must have been, and their witness must have made a difference. This is family evangelism; it is a wonderful

thing when it can occur. So then Ruth and Naomi are the two who arrive back in Israel and they come back to Naomi's homeland in Bethlehem. What are they going to do? It is pretty hard to set up everything; they have been gone for years.

B. Ruth goes out and gleans. Ruth would have heard from Naomi that the Israelite law says that you can glean in the fields. In other words, this law from Leviticus and Deuteronomy says, "Israelites, you must be sloppy farmers. You cannot do a thorough job of farming. You must give it a once-over and you must leave the rest of it for the poor who will come and harvest it for you." It is a built-in, insisted upon, caring for the little person, the needy, the poor. "You can't do a good job of farming; you must be inefficient in your harvesting. I don't mean you can't do a good job of planting, but your harvesting has got to be inefficient." That was the rule. Whether it was the grapes, whether it is the grain, whatever it is, you just must leave something for the poor and they have a right to just come into your land after you have given it your once-over harvesting and take whatever is left. They have a right to do it. Was it being done in most of the days of the judges? Probably not. Was it being done in this exceptional, little town of Bethlehem? Yes it was, especially by one guy named Boaz. In fact, he warns Ruth at one point, "You better not go to anybody else's field, you might get molested but I'll honor the law." By God's grace she comes in contact with someone who honors that law and keeps it.

C. Naomi immediately says, "Wait a minute, you've got a good person here." As time develops, Ruth actually proposes marriage to Boaz and he accepts.

D. Interestingly, if you watch the action, the women make all the key, initial decisions. It does not mean that Boaz cannot make decisions but all the initiation, "Do this, do that." Even with regard to the proposal of marriage, Naomi says, "He'll know what to do." They know that they can count on Boaz and he will respond and he does.

E. In his follow through he brings the matter of the land that Naomi technically owns to the public legal arena, because Naomi married someone, Elimelech, who had inheritance rights to a certain chunk of property near Bethlehem. Boaz stands at the city gate and he says, "Hey, you nearest of kin come here." He assembles a little jury and he says, "I have some land you might be able to buy." The guy says, "I'll buy it." You could only buy land from a relative so it is a big issue, you do not always get a chance to buy land. Then Boaz cleverly says, "By the way, in this deal you have to marry a woman." The guy says, "No, I can't do it, I'll endanger my inheritance." You might say, "What do you mean endanger your inheritance?" Here is the deal. If a man has a couple of wives he cannot assign his possessions to one over the other in terms of inheritance. He cannot disengage from the law that acknowledges the firstborn, he must give him the double-portion and everybody else gets a portion thereafter. It is all laid out there in Deuteronomy 21. How did this work out in practice? This guy is probably already married or he is a widower, so he has children. He is probably old enough that his children are already farming his land. Let's say he has two kids, two boys, they are farming his land already. One of them has two-thirds and one of them has one-third. If he marries Ruth, who is a young woman, he might have eighteen more kids. He will then have to go back and redo the thing and his oldest son no longer gets two-thirds but he gets two-twenty-firsts. You can do the math and figure out how it would work. So he says, "I can't, it will endanger my inheritance." Then Boaz says, "If I am the next of kin after you so I'm moving in now."

F. They do get married and their children then are in the lineage of David. That is the way the book ends, ends with a genealogy. Usually they begin with one, this one ends with one. But in that genealogy you find a wonderful truth. This is the final little thing I want to say tonight. In the case of Ruth, Boaz and Ruth a Moabite, a non-Israelite, have a child Obed who is the father of Jesse who is the father of David. I want to just title this more generally, "Interesting Junctions in the Lineage of the Messiah." Doesn't that sound good? It has a nice ring to it. The point is Jesus himself is here at the end of this list. There is some gaps but here is Jesus at the end of this list. You have got in there an incest. That is incest, Judah and Tamar, his daughter-in-law. Not a happy story at all. Does that prevent God from doing good and carrying out his promise? No. So someday when you minister to a family who has incest, do not say, "Well, there is nothing that can be done for you folks." There is always something that can be done. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven; there is nothing that cannot be overcome. The worse scumbag

can turn around and get converted and do good things. There is always hope. There are a lot of scumbags in the Bible, I assure you, you will find them as we keep reading. Boaz and Ruth, she is not an Israelite, it does not matter. David and Bathsheba, you know that story, it was not a very happy story, it was a terrible thing that David did, it is the great sin it is called, yet from that comes Solomon, the lineage of King David and, therefore, of Christ. Rehoboam and Naamah, Rehoboam, Solomon's son, marries an Ammonite woman. And the Judean kings, many of them are disasters. Then you have Joseph and Mary and then Jesus. Both Joseph and Mary are descended from this same lineage. Eventually it does not matter which "side of the family you go on" to come up with Jesus' lineage. It is just interesting to see that God's plan even for the Messiah involves working with and overcoming these kinds of things that might be thought improper, impossible, inappropriate, forbidden in some way. It does not bother God a bit, it is what he is well able to do.

Let's conclude with a word of prayer if we may.

Thank you Father for what your Word teaches. As we move through it quickly we nevertheless pray that we may catch good, clear glimpses of the kinds of truths that will help us serve you and minister for your glory. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen.

1 & 2 Samuel

Tonight we talk about the reign of Saul, David, and Solomon. This is what is called in many, many places the United Monarchy. The Israelites had a total of forty-three kings during their history. Forty of those kings reigned when there was a divided monarchy, that is, when the nation had split as a result of a civil war and did not become reunited. Many, many nations have split but gone back together again after a time, but North and South Israel were a lot like North and South Korea today, sometimes very bitter foes, other times more peace, sometimes actually fighting, sometimes even allies against some other enemy temporarily in certain ways, but the civil war had not been resolved and so most of the history is that way.

I. Three Kings

Tonight we deal with the beginning of Israel during which three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon reigned where the country was united under a single king. Even then we can see in the stories of the rivalry between David, for example, and Saul's sons that there were plenty of things that were not unified and the tendency for the north and the south to look at each other suspiciously, to feel separated one from another by regional differences and so on, was there from the very beginning. Nevertheless it was a united monarchy and because David ruled about forty years, his predecessor Saul ruled for some period of time, which is not certain unfortunately, Solomon, David's successor ruled, for forty years, we assume that the combined time of this united monarchy, the so called "Empire Years," was something like a hundred and twenty years. The simple problem with the reign of Saul is this: In the Hebrew, the original, it says, "And Saul reigned and two years." That is the way the Hebrew is worded. "And two years." Normally in Hebrew you say something like ten and two, twenty and two, or whatever. Normally you would assume that whatever it was it was some decade plus two. It was at least twelve, probably not more than forty-two, somewhere in the middle. In the New Testament there is a reference to the fact that Saul reigned "forty years." On that basis it would be very tempting to say, "Oh, this some kind of a botched up copy, some scribe got sleepy at that point." You know how you dream funny things or if some of you have had as many, a quarter as many, children as I have had and had to read them bedtime stories at night when you yourself are a little sleepy. My kids used to love it when I would fall asleep reading because I would drift off into nonsense. They would go, "Daddy, Daddy, you fell asleep!" They would love that. Maybe the scribe did something like that. The problem is this--forty happens to function in Hebrew like in English the expression "several dozen." In other words the word "forty" in Hebrew has a special usage. We see it so often. The Israelites were forty years in the wilderness, it turns out they were thirty-eight years and eleven months but you round it off to forty and forty means several dozen. The flood was caused for Noah by rain that came forty days and forty nights. That is an idiomatic expression that could be translated, "several dozen days and nights steadily." Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. It might have been thirty-six, it could have been fifty-one, it means several dozen. Because of this, one has to be a little careful about the New Testament reference to the Old Testament. Even though the New Testament is in Greek, the people writing the New Testament are all baptized Jews and they are all reflective of Semitic idiomatic language even in their Greek. We see lots of examples of that; it is not hard to prove it. That just gives us caution about accepting as purely literal the term "forty" in the New Testament. We do not know but everybody guesses somewhere around twenty years for the reign of Saul, probably not more than forty and that is the best we know how to do.

II. 1 & 2 Samuel

One of the wonderful things to be aware of when we start reading the stories is that 1 and 2 Samuel are really a unit. They get their name from Samuel, an early key character. He is the big early character in the book obviously.

This is very normal. This is what is called *incipit* naming. *Incipit* is a Latin word, which means "the beginning of" something or "as it begins," beginning naming. We do this for many, many hymns and poems. What is the name of the hymn? "Blessed Assurance." How does it start? Blessed assurance What is the name of the hymn? Amazing Grace. How does it start? Amazing grace It is *incipit* naming; it is a very common thing to do. Some hymnals name all tunes by the *incipit*. Every tune, even if the more familiar term from the chorus, say "love lifted me", they will title the hymn, "I Was Sinking Deep In Sin." The Bible does a lot of *incipit* titling. An awful lot of the traditional titles come from the first couple of words or some key phrase early on or some character who is prominent early on. It turns out that Samuel dies still in what we call 1 Samuel. In a way to call a book 2 Samuel is funny. He is not in there, he is dead. Yet what really is being reflected here is that the two books were joined and were one book. It is in the Septuagint tradition, the Greek Old Testament, that we get the beginnings of the divisions. It is an awfully long book; it is easier to divide it.

A. Really what it is, is a bifid. I have used this term before, I will use it again. A bifid book, the Book of Samuel, does divide rather neatly down the middle at the end of the reign of Saul. You have, in what we call 1 Samuel, half way through the whole thing roughly, you have the reign of Saul and the life of Samuel and in the second half, as it were, you have the reign of David.

B. We are also going to go into 1 Kings 1-11 tonight to talk about Solomon. Notice the situation. Solomon who was in some ways Israel's most prestigious king, richest, most famous around the ancient world, perhaps most influential, at least in some key ways, he gets eleven chapters though his reign is forty years. Whereas Saul and David who certainly do not reign any longer than Solomon and who were much more local and less, kind of, cosmopolitan and international get much more coverage. In the same way we talked about the way the book of Judges is organized with a desire to get a message across and not as strong a desire to try to tell every thing "even Steven" chronologically. "If three years went by, let's give that this much space in our text. Three more years, that same amount of space." No. You want to make points, you want to get themes across, you want to teach people about God's relationship to his people and that is going to adjust your space needs and the ratios of space-to-time events in a different way than if you just told everything evenly according to chronological spacing. Same thing in Joshua as we saw it. I think it is obvious in Genesis that we saw that and we have it here again in the books of Samuel and the lives of the three great kings up until 1 Kings 11. We are going to see that likewise in the rest of the historical books, 1 and 2 Kings and in Chronicles and so on. It is very important, therefore, when you are thinking about planning out a preaching series not to say, "Well, I'm just going to cover everything evenly." You have to ask instead the question, "What is emphasized here? How has God inspired this? How is it put together?" If a heavy amount of the main principal material is loaded in the first quarter of the book should I preach more sermons from the first quarter of the book where the juicy stuff is than I do from any other quarter? The answer might be of course, that is exactly what you should do. When you are doing a Bible study, the usual thing is, "We're going to do chapter 14 next week because we did Chapter 13 tonight. Right?" The usual way. If you are wise about it you might just say, "Guys, I have organized this Bible study a little bit differently. Bear with me; I think you'll like it. We are going to do sometimes three or four chapters in one week and other times we are going to do a few verses in one night. The reason we are doing this is because there are some things that we'll see that way that we might otherwise miss." If people try it with you I think they can often enjoy the benefits accordingly. It is always useful to appreciate that the structure of these things and the things emphasized can sometimes be not in normal, typical proportion to the actual passage of time. They are not just what we call annals or straight, chronologically-based history. It is not just reports typed up. No, this is stuff where what happened is selected from and written up in a way that is constantly teaching you about what God wants, what his values are, how he is at work, and how we should be reflective of his purposes and interests. It is another kind of literature from straight history and we have to use it that way.

III. Three Levels of Narrative

I would like also to say something else while I am talking about introductory matters. This is something that we talk about in the book, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, but I just want to be sure you hear it. There really are three levels of narrative operating all the time. "Narrative," formal storytelling, that is what narrative is.

A. First, there is the top level of narrative and that is the level that really is the Bible's story as a whole. The great grand story of redemption. Here we are living in a planet where we are in sin and we need a rescue, we need a savior to come and help us, cannot do it ourselves and the Old Testament leads up to that and primes you for it and teaches you how it is a necessity. The New Testament shows it happening and points toward eternal life and so on. That is the big picture, the Bible story, the great top level.

B. But then there is going to be a middle level and that is going to be the individual, large blocks of material. For example, we might say the stories of Saul. These occupy most of 1 Samuel. All about how there was a need for him to become king and how he was chosen and the various up and down things--the whole account of Saul. Sometimes people use the term "cycle" for that. I am not sure why because it does not seem to me all that descriptive. But they will talk about the "Saul Cycle" and I think the idea probably is that you draw a circle around it and say in this circle is all the stuff about Saul--the Saul Cycle. I would just say the stories, the block that is about Saul.

C. But then there is going to be the lowest level or the lower level. That is going to be any particular, individual story about him. How, for example, he hid among the baggage one time when he should have been out there leading the people. Individual story, might be ten verses long or a chapter long or whatever. But that is the individual story. Maybe the story of how David could have killed him when he was in the cave but David did not and so what that demonstrated about Saul. Individual story, sometimes just a few verses, sometimes as long as a chapter or so. You need to appreciate the fact that that is the way it works all the time in narrative. You have always got three levels going at once. The richness of what God has inspired normally comes out better to you and to others if you will just say, "Alright, our Bible study, I'm ready to talk about the low level, that is this particular story of how Saul would get furious and how David calmed him down with music. I am ready to do that." But am I ready to say how does this fit within the overall block about Saul. What part of the story about Saul does this fill in? What if it were not there? What would we not know about Saul that we ought to know about Saul? That is the preparation in the middle level. But then for really effective Bible study I suggest you want also to say, "How does this relate to the big picture? Why is this thing in the Bible as a whole? With all the wonderful truths in Scripture, how come God included this story? What is the purpose? What is its special role, its particular contribution, its support to the real big plan of redemption?" That is very useful to ask. You do not want to overbuild the story and say, "This story about Saul and the cave is key to the atonement." You do not want to do that, you are overdoing it, so you have to put it in its proper place. It may be that you will say that this is a very small thing but you always ought to see how it somehow touches on the top level. This is part of really properly addressing a Biblical story. By the way, the term is often used *pericope* this term for an individual level of a narrative. A pericope means something you can cut around, it is a small unit but it is self-contained. You can say, "Yeah, here is a little story, a little incident." It is a story. Obviously, it is part of something bigger. You can actually cut it out of the page and you can still read it and say, "Okay, that is a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end." We call that a pericope. Another term that is used is *passage*. Passage is a looser term than pericope. Pericope specifically means a true, self-contained unit. Whatever is a particular, smallest, self-contained unit that you have got. You want to identify all three levels. Definitely in preaching you want to do that. If you are preaching through 1 Samuel, you are preaching through the middle level but you are preaching each week on one of the lowest level pericopes and hopefully you are always relating it every week to the big picture so that people come away saying, "I'm glad that I heard that sermon because that explained to me from that passage about things that relate to the big picture of why I'm a Christian and why I am trying to follow Christ and what my purpose is in life and what God's purpose is for me and for this world of his." It is great to do that. We talk about it and give some illustrations of it from the

book of Genesis, and so on, in the chapter on reading narratives in *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*. But I think that this is a good kind of thing to be aware of. Sometimes this top level gets called the "Meta-Narrative." From the Greek *meta* that can mean, kind of, overarching, it is one of its possible meanings, or accompanying everything. The meta-narrative is the top level; just another terminology that is sometimes used.

IV. The Kingdom of Saul [Map Link #1](#) [Map Link #2](#)

Let's take a look at a map and just get a feel for something that I think is helpful to observe. This map is titled *The Kingdom of Saul* and I know you cannot see all of the individual locations and so on, but can you see that within the promised land there is this red line delineating the kingdom of Saul? Can you also see that there are a couple of circles within the outer red line? Those circles represent key territory that even during the kingdom of Saul was absolutely *not* in Israelite hands. If you had enough time and a very fine pen you could draw a lot of other circles too, because, in fact, lots and lots of Canaanites were living everywhere among the people. Broadly speaking, Saul was the dominant political leader of the whole area and the Israelites were more dominant than the Canaanites *except* in these two areas. One of them is around Jerusalem, the other is up in the country around Beth-shan and you see that right around that area is also the designation Mount Gilboa. Mount Gilboa is the place where Saul loses his life at the end of the book of 1 Samuel. That final chapter when he is killed and Jonathan the crowned prince is killed, they are battling it out at Mount Gilboa. What this means is that as I have drawn the arrow, the Philistines which already have a big bulge in there during his time, have driven the Israelites all the way in to other non-Israelite territory. Saul is fighting to keep the country from being totally divided. That is how desperate things were and how powerful the enemies could be at various times. Did Saul generally keep this under general on-balance Israelite control? Sure, but it was not easy. During the reign of Saul the conquest still remains incomplete. We saw the issues related to Joshua, the problems of sin, the example of it in chapter 7, the sin of Achan. We saw in Judges the references to the fact that the land was not entirely in the hands of the Israelites and sadly the Israelites were not very worthy occupants of the land in their behavior so their enemies often oppressed them. Now we see during the days of Saul it is continuing. It is still problematic and difficult.

V. Orienting Data for 1&2 Samuel

Let me then give a little bit of orienting data for 1 and 2 Samuel.

A. Here is a summary of the content.

1. The transition, that is a very carefully chosen word, from the last judge, Samuel, to the first king, Saul. That is important. This is the book, 1 Samuel, in which we move from the era of the judges, which was a very long period of time, somewhere between 250 and 400 years, a really long time, and the kingship, which is of course inaugurated by Saul. So Samuel is the last of something. He is the last of the judges. He does function like a judge. He is sometimes a military leader. He is sometimes a spiritual leader. He is even more specially very often functioning virtually as a priest but by all means he was also judging, that is, like any prominent national leader in Bible times he became kind of an appeals court. The king did this, the leader of any country; the leader of any tribe would become an appeals court. It happened to Moses, it continued to happen to leaders. Of course they used the name judge because that is one of their inescapable duties.

2. But also I have said here the rise and tumultuous reign of David. We tend to think of David in very, very favorable terms because of his role in the history of salvation, the plan of redemption. David plays a key role in the plan of redemption but he plays it very imperfectly. He is in many ways a real scoundrel and in many ways a weakling at what he does. What David is so good at is military leadership. He is just a fabulously good, extremely skillful military leader. In most other ways he is not good. The picture of David, which is described mostly in 2 Samuel (2 Samuel is basically the story of David's reign as king), one observes David having numbers of rebellions

against him including from his own family, being a pretty poor husband and father and having all kinds of strife and hardship as a result in his family. We also see him not well able to handle some kinds of things and other people have to do his work for him. Even late in his life we see him in the beginning chapters of 1 Kings saying to Solomon, "You know, I always wanted to get rid of Joab but I couldn't. Why don't you do it?" The weak kind of leader who says I need somebody else to fire this person, I cannot bring myself to do it directly. The great thing about David is that he is God's choice and if God makes him his choice God is going to do through him what he wants to do. So God appoints him to be the king who will be the beginning of the dynasty in Jerusalem that will not end but will in fact come to fabulous fruition in the King of kings, that is, Jesus. So God just designates him. It is not that he says, "David, as I've examined you, I have found you like Noah, just righteous in my eyes." No that is not said, he is a rascal in many ways but God has a plan and a purpose. He is going to use this guy and he is going to give him a prominent position in history and accordingly there will be much made of David in the Scripture. But, since we have so much detail about him we know that he is hardly a moral example.

B. We also do not know who the author is here; we have the problem of not knowing who wrote most of the Old Testament narrative books. These people are not named. We can call somebody the Chronicler or we can call somebody the author of whatever but we really do not know. However, I think it is reasonably said often that these books are called the former prophets. That is a longstanding traditional designation in Judaism and it is because of two things. 1) These books reflect just as the prophets do God's story based on his covenant with his people. There is a lot of good advice, good knowledge in these stories. 2) Whenever there is any hint given of who the author is it is a prophet. There are a few places where it will say, "Are not the rest of these things found in the chronicles of the prophet Iddo, or is not this found in such and such." Because whenever you have a sense of who the author might be of some little section that was largely borrowed or whatever then you find out that it is a prophet. There is a lot behind the idea of calling these books the Former Prophets. In Judaism you have four blocks of material. You have the books of Moses or the Pentateuch; the Former Prophets, what we call from Joshua to 2 Kings; then you have *the* Prophets, the sixteen prophetic books; then the rest are lumped together called the Writings. That is a simple, easy, catch-all type of coverage for designating the books. We are right in the heart of the former prophets with what we deal with tonight.

C. When would they have been written? It just seems like Solomon, a commissioner of so many things, Proverbs and other documents, might have been the one to have these all written down, gather the materials together, have them composed. Thus, since you are covering David's reign and then Solomon's reign with 1 and 2 Samuel and the beginning of Kings, it is just likely that 1 and 2 Samuel are written down during Solomon's time and that Solomon's story would have been written down shortly after he died in around 931 B.C.

D. It is from the last judge, Samuel, maybe 1090 B.C., to the last years of David's kingship, that is 971. David apparently reigned 1011 to 971 B.C. That is the best dates that anybody has been able to come up with.

E. What are some of the emphases? We have talked about the overview, what are some of the emphases? Here are fourteen of them.

1. Any historical narrative is going to include the continuation of God's plan of redemption. That is important to appreciate. You look for that in one way or another, that is what they are doing. Here is a plan; a promise that starts in the book of Genesis, God is carrying it through. There may be lots of ups and downs but you are following the progress. God will not let his people just fall off into nothing and be decayed. He will not let this world fail to hear his good news so he has got a way of working the plan in, it is leading somewhere, it is always going somewhere.

2. The need for transition, that is a terribly important theme.

3. Samuel's good service. He is a fine figure and has a few flaws but not many. He is a real welcome breath of fresh air after the book of Judges ends its story of the judges with someone like Samson. Boy, is Samuel a nice contrast by comparison.

4. Danger from the Philistines. There are many enemies that bother the Israelites, the Amalekites now and again, the Moabites now and again, various groups, but always the Philistines just as it was in the book of Judges so it is in 1 and 2 Samuel. The powerful enemy, the one they really have to fear, the one that is the massive threat, that is the Philistines--constant, steady threat. The Philistines are stuck on the coast and they want inland. If I just show the map again for a moment, you see everything along the west is Philistine territory. But it is a coastal plain and you can only do so much in a coastal plain. There is a lot of sand there; there is a certain amount of grain that can be raised but very difficult to raise cattle there, very difficult to raise sheep and goats. Almost impossible to grow figs and wine, it just will not grow there as well. The Philistines want to move inland. That is what they want. They want the same territory that the Israelites have got. The Philistines are well organized, they are skillful, their culture is far superior to that of the Israelites, unfortunately for the Israelites. You may remember the small reference in the book of Judges to the fact that when people wanted to get a sword or spear sharpened, or for that matter, an ax handle or anything else, they really had to go to the Philistines because the Israelites were in effect still living in the Bronze Age and the Philistines were technologically much advanced. This is so archeologically. You look at Philistine pottery, some of it is fabulous, beautiful stuff, well made, beautifully shaped, beautifully decorated. You look at Israelite pottery and it looks like something a kid made in kindergarten. You look at Philistine homes, beautiful paved-floor homes, very nice. Look at Israelite homes, all dirt floor and not very big and not very fancy. Did God pick the Israelites because they were good, the kind of people who could have gotten a PhD if it had been offered? No, he did not pick them because they had anything going for them. They were a bunch of former slaves in Egypt. That is all they were. They did not have the skills, the technology, the prestige, the education, the anything but he chose them to be his people. It is a wonderful story. That is what he does with people all the time today. You cannot impress God; he is not impressed by that sort of thing. He chooses whom he will and when he chooses it is wonderful thing to be part of that people that he has set up for himself. The fact that you can ask to get in is really wonderful.

5. Saul's tragic reign. Sadly his story is a tragedy, that is, it ends unhappily rather than happily. It starts out with great promise and goes down hill.

6. The hopeful rise of David. This is a big theme, the rise of David. Because almost all through 1 Samuel the action is with David. David is mentioned more in 1 Samuel than he is in 2 Samuel, which is about his reign. So the name David actually appears more during the time that he has been anointed in this early, private anointing that he had as king. Then Saul is still king and David is trying to serve him and work with him and do this and that and half of the time running from him. All these different things that are happening and he is still technically rising. It is obvious that David is on his way to be king. We just keep following the story of the "Rise of David". A couple of scholars have even used the abbreviation HDR (History of David's Rise) to describe the preponderance of texts in 1 Samuel that are obviously on that topic.

7. God's protection of His people is a great theme; you ought to always preach and teach that.

8. The need for not just any king but a good king. That is terribly important. What the Israelites thought is, "We need a king". What Samuel reminded them, what Deuteronomy 17 had already predicted to them, what many of them understood but many did not was that they did not need a king, they needed a good king. That is the key. A lot is to be made of that, I think, in your preaching and teaching.

9. The messianic "Davidic Covenant". A very important theme that we will look at, I hope.

10. Completion of the conquest. David is the one. David really does subdue the whole Promised Land very decisively.

11. The choice of Jerusalem. Jerusalem eventually becomes the biblical city--the place where we all belong, the metaphor in Scripture for heaven itself.

12. The horrible consequences of David's adultery, and they are severe. The prophet comes to him and says, "The sword will not depart from your family." A way of saying, "From now on, family warfare."

13. Various rebellions against David showing that he was a weak leader in many ways from the point of view of popularity. If it were not for very great personal loyalty to him on the part of some key people he would not have stood a chance to retain his position as king until his death.

14. Initial plans for a temple. They come out of a disastrous plague in the last chapter as you have read it, 2 Samuel 24. The temple is a very important thing and the transition, therefore, from tabernacle to temple is also technically going on in these books. It is a transition from judgeship to kingship and a transition from non-monarchy to monarchy and transition from tribal to federal. But it is also, interestingly enough, a transition from tabernacle to temple. That is partly built into this because certainly when you finish with the story of Solomon you have got the temple all full built and no more tabernacle.

VI. Overview

Finally take a look at this little overview. It just may help put a couple of things in perspective for you.

A. If you look at the first seven chapters Samuel is it. He is the focus of those chapters. Yes, Eli is in there and Samuel's mother and so on but it is ninety-five percent Samuel.

B. Then, from 1 Samuel 8 to 1 Samuel 15 you have Samuel and Saul working together. So the stories tend to be about them both, interaction between the two of them.

C. Then when you hit 1 Samuel 16 and onward suddenly David is in the picture and Samuel is not. Samuel has almost no role to play. Mention is made of his death very briefly but he has just suddenly receded and the inspired author is now working with the pair, David and Saul.

D. Then after the breakpoint, after the middle of the bifid point, after the division of the book, you have in 2 Samuel David alone. The transition thing that I have talked about is kind of even emphasized. Here is one person then somebody joins in and then that person fades and somebody comes in and joins him--it is almost like the way we think of a relay race. One person for a while they are together then one person takes over for the other. It is almost like that. You move then from the last judge to the greatest of the kings, David. I say Solomon is in many ways thought of as greater but the Bible presents David as the greatest in a very interesting pattern where what could have been said other ways was not but rather this is very thematically organized to be sure you see that as God was working he was working through this person, the next one came in and then the next one comes in and there is a replacement going on but it is very orderly, very steady during this "United Monarchy." It will not be steady necessarily and it will not be orderly necessarily during the divided monarchy. In the north it will be chaotic at many, many points. Likewise in the south, though the south will preserve always the David dynasty. Every king of the south will be descended from David. None of the kings of the north will be. So one dynasty for the whole history of the south, many for the north. Lots of intrigue, assassinations, usurpations, and so on.

Three Kings

I. David

Interestingly, I think this is as good a time as any to talk about it, you will notice that at two or three places a comment is made David is "a man after my own heart," says God. We might easily say, "How can this be so? He is a murderer, he is an adulterer, he is a disaster as a parent and as a husband." He is very unpopular for large blocks of his reign. I think, on balance, most scholars have felt, though there is a little bit of reconstruction guessing involved, you do not have all the details about every year of David's reign, that he was probably, mainly unpopular. A little like the Truman administration. You know if you study the Truman administration he had pretty low popularity. It was not a time that most people said, "Harry Truman, oh boy, are we glad to have him in the White House." Nevertheless he did some pretty significant and influential things but was not a hugely popular president. David was something like that. If they had popularity poles in his day, David would be down in low numbers and down in single digits at certain points I am sure. So how can he be called a man after his own heart? How can this possibly be? I think the answer is that the meaning of this is not to be after God's own heart you have got to be a model person. That is not what it means. What David has got, no matter how his behavior is, no matter how horrible his sin, he has always got absolute, solid, and I would say especially, exclusive trust/faith in the true God. That is what really makes him who he is. That is the thing about David.

II. Saul

A. Now I would like to draw a contrast. I would like to point out something that can easily, easily, easily be missed in reading these materials because of the fact that it is stated so simply and directly that you, the reader in English, often really do not see it. You are not likely to catch it very easily. I refer you to 2 Samuel 2:8. The title in the NIV says, "War Between the Houses of David and Saul," that is really true. There was a real rivalry between the royal families of Saul and David. Saul actual royal family--David potential. "Abner son of Ner, he is the commander of Saul's army, took Ish-Bosheth, son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim." That is just a big deal and they made him king over there and so on. This guy's name is Ish-Bosheth. *Ish* means "man" in Hebrew and *Bosheth* means "shame." Put together they mean "man of shame." This guy is called man of shame. Why? Who would name a child man of shame? The answer is not Saul. He did not name him man of shame. How do we know?

B. In Chronicles he is called Ish-Baal, man of Baal. Do you know who Baal is? Baal is that idol, that weather god, that Canaanite deity that so many Israelites got to worship. Indeed when we come later to 1 Kings 18 in the story of Elijah we will observe that God tells Elijah (it is actually 1 Kings 19 where he says this) he says, "I still have 7,000 people in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed him," meaning of course, all the others have. The vast majority of Israelites worshipping Baal. What do we observe then? I am giving you a very quick bit of evidence. There is much more. I am giving you just an outline of it. To the extent that you can trust me, fine. If you cannot, be skeptical and study it for yourself. Here is what you will find. You will find that this concept was so horrid, the idea that the first king of Israel named his son Man of Baal, meaning of course, Saul was worshipping Baal along with Yahweh that the scribes who handled the books of Samuel substituted the word Bosheth. This is a phenomenon that is called in Hebrew a *tiqqune sopherim*, a correction of scribes. There are about two dozen of them in the whole Hebrew Bible and they mark these. These are marked in the Hebrew Bible by the rabbis. The tradition understood it that people hated so much in the prophets, now when it is in the writings in Chronicles it is a little different, they just let it go, they did not push the thing there. But they hated so much in these prophets to have anybody grow up in Judaism and read that the son of this guy was named Ish-Baal, son of Baal that they actually just changed it so that nobody could miss the fact this was bad. What it means though is that Saul was a syncretist. I think I have used that word before but just in case it slipped by I just want you to be sure you understand what

we are talking about here. Syncretism is the conjoining of beliefs. It is where you say, "Yes, I believe in Yahweh and yes I believe in Baal." You put them together even when they should not be put together you do it. Almost everybody in the ancient world was a syncretist. People were happy to believe in more gods and goddesses. If they learned about a new god or goddess they would say, "Great, I will bear it in mind." It is like learning about, yet another doctor on your medical plan. "I might need him or her so it is good I have the list." Saul was a syncretist. Was he probably mostly worshipping Yahweh most of the time, probably was but he was hedging his bets by also keeping his hand in Baal worship as well even then naming one of his children that way to demonstrate his loyalty. That is on one side of David--the early side of David.

III. Solomon

Then what about his successor Solomon? For that we will leap ahead to 1 Kings 11 and begin to read, "Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter--Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love." Verse 4, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been." There it is just really clear what is implied by the idea, "A man after God's own heart." So Solomon also became a syncretist. This was powerful, it was hard to resist. The attractions of idolatry were enormous. He followed, therefore, Ashtoreth the Sidonian god, Molech the Ammonite god. Built various shrines for them as verses 7 and 8 say, offered sacrifice to their gods. This caused, actually, the breakup of the kingdom. God was not going to reward that with having Solomon go to the grave with the confidence that all his successors would take over the nation and have a wonderful united and powerful nation. No. When the people are supporting this and letting the king do it they also are complicit. They also are involved. On either side of David is syncretism--Saul does it, Solomon does it. David is smack-dab in the middle, he is getting himself in every kind of trouble. If he were today he would probably would be experimenting with marijuana and getting drunk and everything else you could think of and divorced and remarried fourteen times in a mess, but there is never any doubt in his mind who the only God is and who the true God is and that you need to tell him, "Look I have no hope except in you." That is such a great message that if you preach it and teach it your people are going to be helped by that. You are going to find that as you do pastoral counseling that large numbers of people who look wonderful on the outside and are just amazingly skillful have disastrous family lives. It is very sad. Because it is hard to have a good family life. It does not always work. It is not always natural. So they will come to you in counseling and people that you thought were on top of the world, nicest couple and so on, and they will start talking about their relationship and you will say, "Aw, this is awful." You will have people come to you and confess the kinds of sins that they are doing and you will say, "This is unbelievable." You will discover enmities in families even when the best of intentions are there. You can have the finest parents and certain kids will say, "My parents are boring, I'm out of here." Or much worse than that. Enmity can occur in all kinds of ways and problems. Those people, then, will be put off and will not feel a part of God's plan of redemption if all you are saying is to please God you have got to be really nice. That is a wrong message to send. You should be really nice and if you are it will please God but it is not the sufficient or necessary thing to please God. To please God is to trust in Him and say, "You're my only hope. When I look at the cross and see that Jesus died for me, that is it, my only hope, that is all I've got." That is what people need to hear because then the sinners will be able to say, "Hey, maybe there is something for me. I might be able to do something for the Lord. If that crud, David, whom even I can find fault with, was a man that God used and called after his own heart. Maybe I could do it. I would never have thought that. I thought you had to be at least as nice as Charlton Heston in the Ten Commandments to be able to do anything significant for God. People are living with this impression. They are living with the impression that you have got to be a saint of some kind to really accomplish something and we sometimes give that impression. People should know they can be used by God if they have absolutely nothing to commend them but everything to condemn them except for the fact that they have placed their faith in Christ. Boy, if they have got

that, wham, can things begin to happen. I think David's life is wonderful for that. Wonderful to show what is it that makes a person after God's own heart. Definitely when you preach these bring out Saul's syncretism, bring out Solomon, sandwich David in there, bring out all the flaws of David that say, "But why?," and point that out and I think you will have made a point that will be of enormous help to many people.

IV. Redemption

I have given you some sense of overview and I realize that it is very broad scale but I would like to talk about some of the particulars that one comes across. I just think it is interesting to be sure that we know what we are dealing with in 1 Samuel 1 where it says that Hannah wanted to dedicate her son to the Lord. Can you get that concept in the story of how she brings Samuel up to the tabernacle there at Shiloh and she says, "I will present him before the Lord and he will live there always." She does this and that is a lot of what chapter 1 is about. It is a story of Samuel's birth and his mother is so grateful that she presents him to the Lord. What she is doing is not redeeming him. That is what I want you to catch. What would she normally have done? What would the vast majority of people have done with every child born to them? The answer is they would have followed Leviticus 26 and they would have redeemed them. So here is the basic thing, here is some references to it in that law but I am just going to summarize what went on in Ancient Israel. God said to the people every firstborn is mine. It does not matter what it is. Anything you own, the first of your crops, the first of your children, the first of your animals, all mine. But did God then really want to take the firstborn? He says no. I do take the firstborn of goat kids and lambs. I do take the firstborn of all crops, so anything that is normal, edible stuff, yes. God would not take the firstborn of a pig, you were not supposed to raise them anyway, but that is an unclean animal, he would not take the firstborn of an unclean animal. He specifically says, "I won't take the firstborn of a donkey. Don't try to bring it into the temple." Did he want people actually to give up their children to him? No, that should be very exceptional, very exceptional. What do you do? You have to buy them back, you trade something for their life and that trade is a payment and that is what redemption means. You buy something back. In theory every family would bring its firstborn to the temple or tabernacle and say, "Here you are God, it is yours, you said so." But in actual fact, God says, "No, I don't want any child unless you want this child to grow up and be one of my priests or Levites or something, or to work here in the temple. So, therefore, what I am saying to you is, instead give me a payment. I will technically let you buy back your firstborn. That is the concept of redemption. It gets extended to a number of situations. Even the taking of censuses because it is such a great risk involved. We will talk about that if we get a chance tonight but buying back is a big theme. Did God have to do this? No, He did not. Think of the big top level, think of the meta-narrative, the top-level story in which the concept of redemption is going to be very basic to God's whole plan of dealing with human history. What is God going to do with us who are in deep trouble? The answer is he will buy us back. What will he pay? A perfect substitute payment and that will be one of us makes the payment with his own life for all of us and that one of us is actually God as well as human so his infinity as God makes the substitution of infinite application, that is, all who trust in him can equally well be substituted for. It is a wonderful thing. You make the payment in kind but the New Testament uses the language of redemption much more than it uses the language of, say, being born again. The language being born again is mainly in John 3 but the language of redemption that is in a lot of places. So it is a very big theme. What God is doing in a story like this, if you preach on 1 Samuel or lead a Bible study on it, be sure to bring that out. This is a way of helping people to get the concept of redemption and what Hannah does, which is very special, is not to redeem him. He then does go and becomes technically, kind of, God's child there in God's house. That is the way it works. That is just a simple fact, but I thought I would point it out here in a place where at the very beginning of our material we come across it. This passage from Numbers 18, by the way, also addresses the same sort of thing. "Every devoted thing is yours but everything that opens the womb that is offered to the Lord shall be yours, nevertheless the first born you shall not redeem. The firstling of unclean beasts you shall not redeem." This stated now to Aaron as the leader of the temple. It all comes into the temple, belongs there as Aaron represents God then the redemption price is set, high enough that it is a bit of a sacrifice but not so high that it is an equivalent of a 39.6% tax bracket.

V. Covenant Renewal Speech

A. We also have in 1 Samuel 12 a pretty interesting covenant renewal speech so that that chapter kind of partakes of the category, covenant renewal, in a way that many others do. It is a farewell speech. Samuel gets all the people gathered around. He says, "Look, I have done these things and I have been fair and square and tried to be honorable." Then look what he does. In verse 6 he starts telling a story. "The Lord appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your forefathers up, Jacob and so on. Then he talks about the days of the judges and what happened and then the Lord sent Jerubbaal, that is Gideon, who also was a syncretist by the way and so on. He finally mentions his own name in the third person, "and Samuel," that is verse 11 of 1 Samuel 12. He goes on and describes the whole story.

1. If you think about it that is a covenant preamble and prologue review. That is classic preamble, prologue review; going over the story of how we got to this place.

2. Then, you have the stipulations. Verse 14, "If you fear the Lord, serve him, obey him, don't rebel against his commands. Good. But if you don't obey, his hand will be against you as it was against your fathers." There you have the stipulations summarized. Obey his covenant.

3. And the curses and blessings--that is the sanctions summarized. Good if you obey, big trouble if you do not. So it has got those elements as well. So we have preamble, prologue, stipulations, sanctions.

4. Then he says, "Look what's happening, look how it is going and all these things. You've got to serve the king." Verse 20, "Turn to the Lord, don't turn away from him but turn to him. Serve the Lord with all your heart, don't turn after useless idols. Verse 24, "Be sure to fear the Lord, serve him with all your heart, consider what great things he has done for you." That consider is not quite a document clause but it is the virtual equivalent. In other words, think it through, pay attention to the covenant, what it says. That is like saying, "Read the document again."

5. He does not have in here, specifically, a list of witnesses like heaven and earth or something, but what he does imply is that the Lord is a constant witness to them and furthermore he is saying, "Look, as I come to the end of my life, I am your witness. I am telling you what the story is." In one way or another, sometimes delicately or implicitly, other times very obviously, you have covenant renewal here.

B. This is one of many such speeches. Here is just a listing. I do not think there is any question on the exam that says, "List a bunch of covenant renewal speeches," but if you were asked, "Give a special feature of 1 or 2 Samuel." And you could say, "Well, among other things it has one of the big covenant renewal speeches." That would be a very fine contribution; very good answer. But there are lots of them.

1. Ex 20 - Lev 26, Num: Obviously, the first covenant.

2. Deut: Deuteronomy has it.

3. Joshua 24: We talked about that before.

4. 1 Kgs 8: Here is another one. We are going to see one in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

5. 2 Kgs 28: Josiah is going to give a beauty in 2 Kings 23.

6. 2 Chr 15: Asa gives a wonderful one, otherwise rather obscure king.

7. Ezra 9, 10: Ezra gives a gem.

8. Neh 8-10: Nehemiah and Ezra lead in one with a lot of covenant elements in it as well. Covenant renewal is a big thing.

C. What about the New Covenant? When do we do covenant renewal? The Lord's Supper. Do not forget that and do not forget to teach people that. I think if you said to the average Christian, what is the meaning, what is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? They would answer, "Well, it is to show that we are all united." I really do because I have done it. That is the kind of answer you get. Now that is not wrong. Yes, that is one of the things it shows but what shows is that we are all united and once again saying we accept Christ's covenant. He died for us, we

remember his death until he comes and he said, "This is the New Covenant in my blood so every time you do this remember me and remember you are in covenant with me." He declares it to be a covenant renewal practice. This will help them to see that and they will see, even every time they take communion, they will see that they are part of the meta-narrative of Scripture. The great plan of redemption and all these covenants testifying to it successively that God has done it for you, your job is to respond to him and to keep his covenant. It is a wonderful privilege to do it and the renewal of that covenant is taken every time there is communion. We do a lot more covenant renewals than the Israelites ever did. We do them really constantly.

1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings

I. Saul Rejected As King

In 1 Samuel 15 there is the story of how Saul gets rejected as king and this is tied up with the fact that he has an opportunity to obey God relative to the Amalekites or not.

A. Verse 2, "The Lord Almighty says I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. So Saul, go attack the Amalekites. Totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Don't spare them; men, women, children, infants, cattle, sheep, camels, donkeys, etc." That is a holy war command. There is God speaking through a prophet saying, "Do this, you've got to do it," or speaking directly to Saul, but it says, "Samuel said to Saul, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says,'" so it is hard to doubt that it at least came first through Samuel. Here we have a clear command right from God through a prophet, in the formal instance at least, saying you have got to do this. The holy war terms are there. Total annihilation of the enemy has to happen.

B. What is so bad about the Amalekites one might ask?

1. And I just want to be sure you know that the Amalekites were Israel's first enemy. One kind of thinks of the Egyptians as the Israelites' first enemy because, of course, the Israelites were chased by the Egyptians. Once they had left Egypt then the Pharaoh changes his mind and sends the troops out and so on. What is important to appreciate is this: The Israelites did not have to fight the Egyptians ever. They really were not an army yet.

2. By just a matter of weeks later as they had come to Rephidim, which is right near Mount Sinai, almost at the base of Mount Sinai, then they did have to fight and this is their first battle. That battle is the one you know in which Moses had his hands up in the air and as long as he prayed, fine. He had his staff that he was holding too; that symbolized the presence of God among them, maybe, even the throne of God as it says at the end of chapter 17. Whenever he lowered that it was as if, of course, symbolically that God's presence was being diminished. Anyway the Amalekites attacked the Israelites who were not doing anything to them. There was not much reason. The Israelites were down at rather an isolated place in Mount Sinai but the Amalekites make the presumption that, "Hey, this is a territory that we wonder around in," the Amalekites were semi-nomadic, "and there is another group here. Let's get rid of them quick before they ruin the neighborhood." It was that kind of a mentality. Too many people moving in. "The potential is there so we have to act quickly to eradicate it." Thus God says, "Since that is what they tried to do, wipe out my people before they even got to Mount Sinai to become my people." That is the point. It would be like trying to beat somebody up on his way up to the front of the church to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. That is a bad thing to do. These Israelites are trying to get to Mount Sinai, they are almost there, they will become a people, receive God's law, understand how they can please him by offering sacrifices that symbolize the work of Christ, and that is terribly important for them to learn. That is desperate, that is going to be their salvation and these guys are trying to prevent it from happening. So God says, "They were just evil and selfish, put this in a book and be sure Joshua hears it so that after you ...", in other words, there is a succession, and Joshua, of course, made sure his successors heard it. "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. They are a holy war enemy for me. Therefore, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Deuteronomy, "Don't forget the Amalekites," like "Remember the Alamo." And Deuteronomy 25:19 further, "Blot them out."

C. It is just important to appreciate the fact that what Saul is to undertake comes with centuries of solemn command of God behind it and he still does not do it. That really does put the thing in perspective, I believe. It really helps you understand that it was not a case where he just forgot or said, "Yeah there was something about that but I have not seen that or heard about it." He knows exactly, precisely, he was brought up knowing that this

is a thing that has to happen eventually, that the holy war of extermination against the Amalekites must occur and he will not do it. He is instead going to disappoint the Lord by bringing all these animals for sacrifice. So Samuel makes the powerful pronouncement in verse 22 and 23. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Does the Lord delight in the fact that you are in the music team helping lead praise choruses? He does delight in it, but as much as he delights in your being an obedient servant who seeks him into your heart? Does the Lord delight in your serving on seven committees in the church as much as..... and so on? That is the principal. Is going through the motions the important thing or is it really seeking to please him? Does the Lord delight that you have twelve hundred people coming out to hear you preach on a Sunday as much as he delights that you just want to do his will wherever you can? That is the kind of questions this brings up. Anyway the rejection of Saul is surely built on a very prominent, long term, centuries old, original, basic, important assignment that he knowingly violates. That is what you need to get.

D. So what happens? That is a pretty big thing for a guy to do. That is a terrible, disgraceful disobedience. God then does the following: 1 Samuel 16:14, "The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul." And in the NIV it says, "And an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." It has to its credit a footnote that says, "or injurious." I would say "injurious" should much more likely have been put in the main part of the text and the footnote say, "or evil." Here is why. The particular Hebrew word that is used is not the common word for evil. It rather is a word that tends to mean "bad, troublesome, harmful, negative," that sort of thing. If you just use a computer concordance and generate all the cases where this word is used you will see it talks about everything from bad weather to bad construction and so on. It is just like we use the word "bad." The only reason I think it is important to say that is that the minute you employ the word "evil" in modern English it tends to suggest actually sinful. This spirit comes from the Lord so it would raise needlessly in people's minds, as I think the NIV translation does, the possibility that there are actual sinful angels still in heaven that God is sending out to do things. "Send some of the sinful ones; it will make the place nicer while they are gone." That really is not what is happening.

II. Ruah

Furthermore, just for the value of looking a little bit at the term that is used, it is an "evil spirit," that is what I would call an injurious or harmful or negative spirit, this really is quite a concept, this concept of "spirit." So I have just quickly put here that this word translated "spirit" is the Hebrew word *ruah* in Hebrew which sounds like you are trying to clear peanut butter from the roof of your mouth.

A. The meaning is, interestingly, "breath, wind or spirit." That we have in Ezekiel at one place and it can mean all of those and it does routinely. Like, by the way, its counterpart in Greek *pneuma* same rich range of meaning, "breath, wind, or spirit." *Pneuma* in Greek, *Ruah* in Hebrew, same meaning.

B. Holy Spirit

C. Breeze

D. Air

E. Sense, in other words, he came to his spirit, we would say he came to his senses.

F. Emptiness or nothingness like the wind.

G. Direction. God gave them a spirit to do so and so, a sense of direction.

H. The human spirit.

I. The mind, it is used that way.

J. One's disposition.

K. A mood or tendency, these are closely related obviously. Hosea 4, "A spirit of prostitution."

L. Courage

M. Often enough, as I think it is here, an angel. But one has to face the fact that it is conceivable and some commentators have argued that it is really an attitude. That is what he gives them. A mood, a tendency. So it is not an open and shut case that it would be an angel. That is important to appreciate. Are God's angels ministering spirits? Yes, they are. They are spiritual beings and can be called spirits. This is just an example of the way we have to be careful in translation. You have got a lot of possibilities and you have to think through what the options are. What I think is an unlikely option, that is my point here, is what it almost looks like it says in the text, and that is that there really are these true, evil beings in heaven who do not do what is right and God sends them out to do things like make Saul miserable. That seems to be very low on the likelihood list and one of these other options, either that it is an angel that will do harm. Can angels do harm? You bet! There is the angel of death that we observe operating, for example, in 2 Samuel 24 bringing about the plague that causes trouble for the Israelites when David sins in that story. Angels do many kinds of things. Christ talks about the angels separating the wheat from the tares at the judgment and casting the tares into the fire. These were angels that were doing things that were injurious to those who deserve to be injured. But that is an important distinction just so you will know because this behavior of Saul, which I regard as a kind of a paranoid behavior, a punishment that is given to him. Does it mean therefore that we should say, "All paranoid behavior is punishment for sin, any psychotic activity?" Of course not. The fact that it is so exceptionally stated here with this big story about the Spirit of the Lord doing this and all of that and the mention that is made of it suggests to us that it is unusual not usual for this kind of thing to happen. Can it happen? Yes. But should be regard all psychoses of any kind as evidence of sinfulness that God is punishing a person by having an angel give them grief, I certainly hope that we would not jump to that conclusion.

III. Showbread

There is a wonderful story in 1 Samuel 21 about David at Nob where he eats the consecrated bread, the "showbread," the bread that is baked and placed symbolically before God on the altar and then eventually eaten by the priests. One can read that and just really not know much about it in the story in the first half of 1 Samuel but it has an interesting background. All I am trying to encourage here is that if you learn about these matters in, say Exodus and Leviticus, then you are not only learning about this passage, 1 Samuel 21, but you are even learning about something that you might preach or teach from in connection with the New Testament where Jesus justifies a special exemption that he uses as a sampling of why the Pharisees are misunderstanding the nature of holy things and are too legalistic. They are missing the boat of the purpose of all these things. If you are going to be legalistic you could not have happen what happened in 1 Samuel 21. I just wanted to demonstrate that Exodus 25 is the source of this holy bread, bread of the presence, showbread, consecrated bread, and that Leviticus even gives us details that there would be a total of twelve loaves, fresh each week, eaten by the priests, and that they constitute a holy share of offering food. In other words, you did not just bring a lamb or a goat kid. If you look at all that is said about sacrifices and offerings, it is actually all the different meal ingredients except for raspberry jello. There is no evidence of that in any of the passages. It is really amazing. There is oil, there is wine that is brought, there is grain and so on. So there are the ingredients for bread, a certain amount of salt and so on. All these kinds of things were involved. We tend to read and notice only the passages that talk about the main ingredient of the meal, that is the meat part, and not realize that there is all the rest of it including things like the showbread. Just a little detail to encourage you that if you pursue these kinds of things it can be surprising how much you can pick out.

IV. Witch of Endor

I want to go to near the end of 1 Samuel, chapter 28, and address comparably, briefly just a little bit about Saul and the "Witch of Endor." That is who she is usually called though I think that translation may be a little thin.

A. This is long after now, Samuel is dead. The Philistines are pressing, pressing, pressing hard and the Israelites are scared. Saul is afraid. He figures that he and the Israelites are likely to lose and he needs help. Who to turn to when you are really desperate? In his mind, if he could only talk to Samuel. Samuel always told him the truth even though it was hard. Samuel always was a fine, faithful, steady, open prophet of the Lord. If only he could.

B. So, sadly, he gets in mind that the way he could talk to somebody who is dead is to go through what is called in this passage a *ba'alath 'ov*. There is the word *ba'alath* that is the feminine of the word *ba'al*, owner or lord. In this case, in Hebrew, it is *ba'alath 'ov*, which means literally "a lady who owns a pit." You might say, "Well, wait a minute, what is that?" Here is the idea. There were thought to be connections to the underworld at certain kinds of rock fissures and caves that went down. In a way you could say, "Well, sure, look at Old Faithful when it suddenly blows up out of the earth or look when you have an earthquake, it is from way up deep or look at a volcano." People had a sense that there was stuff happening down there. They just believed this. So they believed that the underworld was down there with the people who had died and so Saul would believe--it is not a good belief but it is part of the corrupted belief that he was pray to unfortunately as were many other Israelites--he would believe that Samuel was down there. These *ba'alath 'ov* ladies, these pit ladies, were people who alleged that they could make contact with people down in there in the underworld and that these people since they were now at the next stage of life, of course, and greatly progressed. The next stage, even though you are in the "underworld," you just know so much more just as you know so much more when you are in this stage as opposed to when you were in your mother's womb. Boy is that a difference, you know a lot more and so in the next life you know a lot more. Even though you are not yet in the resurrection. They all believed in the resurrection but it had not happened yet but until that time they would know a lot. That is the mentality. These women, of course, were frauds. They could not anymore contact the underworld than Howdy Doody could but that is what they alleged. Surely they were phonies, but he goes to this woman and he says, "I have got to talk to Samuel." She says, "Well you know what Saul has done," not realizing that she is talking to Saul, "He has cut off the spirits. Have you set a trap?" "No," he says, "You won't be punished." She probably said that to everybody because she knew that her activity was technically illegal.

C. Then he says, "Bring up Samuel." Verse 12 says, "When the woman saw Samuel she cried out at the top of her voice, 'Why have you deceived me, you're Saul.'" that is because, of course, she did not really expect to see anything. She had her brother Norm somewhere. It is dark at night, they do this in a tent over the pit. Norm is over on the other side of the tent going, "Hello. Hi, I'm Samuel. Excuse me, I have a cold but what do you want to know?" It is trickery, it is fakery. But God intervenes and actually shows her a kind of image of Samuel. I think that is what we are to understand. I have not proved it to you just by saying it but that is what I really believe is going on. That is what makes her scream at the top of her lungs, she did not expect anything. It was deception that she was practicing. Through this means it is a little like the donkey of Balaam or other cases where God uses something to accomplish his purposes. It is the very opposite of what people think is going to happen.

D. Samuel just says, "Once again, the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands," verse 17, "and given it to one of your neighbors, to David." Saul was a Benjaminite. The next-door neighbor to the Benjaminites were the Judahites, that is it. David was from northern Judah, Saul was from southern Benjamin, they lived a few miles apart in actuality all their lives. It is not a good scene and it is the end of the story for Saul, he knows he cannot win. Samuel has said, "No, don't think that somehow God has forgotten your massive disobedience of a clear, clear command. That's it, you're out of the picture." Sadly then what Saul did was to violate some very basic laws that he himself had actually been enforcing at the time. "Do not practice augury or witchcraft. Do not turn to mediums or wizards." We would classify this woman in the category of a medium. "If a person turns to mediums and wizards

playing the harlot after them (in other words that is a form of religious prostitution of infidelity), I'll set my face against that person and cut him off from his people and so on." Just a lot of verses that one could easily find in any concordance about the same topic.

V. Rebellion Against David

We have talked a little bit about the big sin in David's life, the case where he has Uriah killed and takes his wife Bathsheba to himself and the prophet comes to him and says, "The sword won't depart from your family because you have done that." That is judgment upon David. We have also talked about the fact that he was fantastically successful in military terms. There is even a list of his mighty men, his military commanders as one of the appendices to 2 Samuel. We have mentioned the fact that there were rebellions against him. And even rather base individuals could succeed in this. The big rebellion is that of his own son, Absalom. That is the big rebellion against him. But take a look at this one in 2 Samuel 20. "A troublemaker named Sheba, son of Bichri a Benjamite happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted, 'We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son, everybody to his tent all Israel.'" That is a way of saying, "Let's get out of here and not cooperate." He calls the Israelites to just rebel against him. So it says, "All the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bichri but the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem." You can go on and read about that rebellion and how it finally gets crushed and so on but invariably it is David having the loyalty of Judah only and when a Judahite like his own son Absalom leads the rebellion against David it is then the only people that David has on his side are a few members of his family. Joab is, by the way, his nephew. His commander-in-chief, his military leader, who does so much for him, the one who kills Absalom and generally crushes the rebellions for David, Joab is his nephew. And David has, interestingly a little detail, three divisions. That word divisions much smaller thing, we might say three companies of what are called Pelethites and also Kerethites you might look at that and say, "What are those terms, Pelethites and Kerethites, I don't get that?" Those are Philistine tribes. In other words, you know how you have read as you prepared for tonight how David was involved with the Philistines and during the time he was away from Saul spent a certain amount of time as a mercenary in the employ of Achish, king of Gath. David then hired for himself some Philistine mercenaries, foreign mercenaries, as his personal bodyguard. Why would he do this? Let me give you some analogies. This actually is a time-honored thing. You know how the pope has a group of guards called the "Swiss Guards?" Why have Swiss guards? The answer is that the pope and many members of royalty have employed foreigners as their personal guards on the theory that the foreigners have no vested interest in taking control of the government. That they just are working for pay. You pay them real well and their only loyalty is to you because you pay them and they do not care one whit what happens. They do not have cousins and uncles telling them, "Come on we've got to depose of this guy." They are loyal to the king and the king only or the pope and the pope only. It does not matter what the local population thinks or what the relatives think or what the people in the area think or the natives of the land. You have these foreign mercenaries who are your personal guardians. In the Absalom rebellion it gets down to that level, some family members, some loyal Judahites and his foreign mercenaries. Of course, David has to run. What happens is then he sends back a counselor who advises, he claims to have turned against David and in favor of Absalom. He advises immediate pursuit, so of course that means Absalom has to run, not really gather a trained force and David's small group of professional soldiers led by Joab is able to work it out in such a way as they fight in the woods and they capture and then kill Absalom because, of course, he gets hung up by his hair which is the reason why you should always have short hair. It is just interesting that you see that because it does show you that David was terribly, terribly unpopular at times. That is not what prevented anything though in terms of God's plan. He can still be God's choice. Bear that in mind.

VI. The Census

At the end of his life David does an interesting thing. Turn to 2 Samuel 24. It starts by saying, "The anger of the Lord burned against Israel and he incited David against them." There is something here then that is a punishment. In other words, what you are being told is the next set of events describes something that David did as a punishment for himself and Israel. David may not have been thinking of it that way but that was what God was doing. So he actually put into David's mind the idea of taking a census. "So the king said to Joab," now here is Joab who has assassinated all kinds of people so far and been very bloodthirsty and not the greatest model, "Go throughout all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, enroll the fighting men. I want to know how many soldiers there are." And Joab says, "May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over. May the eyes of my lord the king see it but why does my lord want to do such a thing?" In other words, "Aw, you don't mean that. You don't want to do that do you?" So, what is the problem? David is just taking a census. Why is that so bad?

A. Let me try to demonstrate this very quickly by some references that we have here.

1. Exodus 30: When you take a census everybody has to pay the Lord a ransom for his life, "then no plague will come on them when you number them." Wow!

2. Exodus 38: "The silver obtained from those who were counted in the census," huge amount. All kinds of warnings about census.

3. Numbers 1:26: Big census reference in Numbers 1:26, those were done.

4. 2 Samuel 24:1: Then our passage talks about the anger of the Lord in connection with a census, that is the little tail end of our passage.

5. 2 Kings 12: The reign of Josiah, "Collect all the money from the sacred offerings and the census money."

6. 1 Chronicles 21:1: "As Satan rose up against incited David to take a census." It is that serious. Solomon took a census. Caesar Augustus took a census. There is a census mentioned during the days of Judas the Galilean. But in many of them there is some negative overtone. A lot of census passages have a negative overtone, a danger warning, the need to pay a ransom. What is happening? Let me try to explain it because otherwise the evidence is so scattered it can be easy to miss again.

B. A census was taken for only two purposes.

1. To produce new taxes. You want to find out who is who, who owns land where. Most censuses for the purpose of taxes were to tax people for property. That is why Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem, they owned property there and that is why Jesus happened to be born there though he should have been born in Nazareth but God was behind the whole thing to get him born where it would not have been thought that he would have been born except that if you really knew the prophecies and you knew that he was the Messiah, then of course he has to be born there.

2. The other reason was for counting the troops. Why do you count troops? It is either for taxes or for going to war. It is because you are going to war, you are planning a war. It is the end of David's life. He has conquered the whole Promised Land. There are no pockets holding out against him. He has total control. It says that in several places. As you read 2 Samuel I am sure you noticed that. "The Lord gave David rest from all his enemies round about and so on and so on."

C. Why does he need to go to war again? The answer is because he is planning now, in all probability, an empire outside the limits of the Promised Land. It is the only conclusion anybody has drawn. As commentators have examined this they have said, "Well, here are the facts, it adds up." Why would David do this? There is a story about he has a plan to go beyond the conquest of the Promised Land. That, of course, cannot be approved holy war. You can only fight holy war for the taking and holding of the Promised Land. That is the essential thing about

the holy war. So David is sinning and that is the reason for the warning. When you get an army together, you may not use it correctly. Not all battles are good. It is dangerous, dangerous, dangerous to assemble an army so you better pay a ransom because you have got to do this right or your lives are in danger. "I'll judge you," says the Lord. "If you don't fight a holy war, you'll be the enemy." Just as we talked about in the rules of holy war. The census ransom even relates to that in terms of the danger. What happens in this case is that David does number the fighting men. They do not get a chance to go out and capture any new territory because God stops them by a plague.

D. The nice thing is that the book we call 2 Samuel ends on a positive note because God is so good at turning a terrible situation of sin right around. What happens? David and the elders of Israel are praying for God to stop the plague and it stops right at the threshing floor of Araunah, a guy who lived in Jerusalem. Actually he is a local Canaanite guy. He is the one who owned that threshing floor. They saw people dying. You could just trace it. It was coming in a wave, slowly but surely, as time went by as people were getting sick and starting to cough and die and get fevers. But it stopped right there. So David said, "Well, why not build the temple here?" He said, "God has favored us and been merciful right in this location." And indeed that is exactly what does transpire. So out of this terrible motive comes the grace of God, built into the whole thing, God had it in mind all along and it will be in that location that Solomon, whom we now turn to, built the temple.

VII. Themes of 1 Kings

Themes of 1 Kings include a lot. I am going to quickly talk about a couple of them. We will come back to this because we only want to look at Solomon tonight. We want to just introduce 1 Kings with a quick look at Solomon, that is, the first eleven chapters. Some of the themes:

A. Importance of orthodox worship. Solomon will not be thoroughly orthodox. As we read from 1 Kings 11, he is going to blow it. He is going to actually introduce with government funding the worship of idols around Jerusalem. That is pretty sad.

B. No gift or status automatically keeps people away from apostasy. That is Solomon too. The guy has all the wisdom anybody could ever want. The wisest guy of his time and he still turns out to fall away from wholehearted faith in the Lord. So it has nothing to do even with such a gift as wisdom; the ability to make Godly choices. If you can have the gift to not use it, you are still in trouble.

C. The promises of God carried out even through rebellion. After Solomon's death rebellion is a huge theme. The splitting up of the nation, rebellion against Solomon's son and so on.

D. True unity by belief even though there was political division. There are bits and pieces of that. You can see that in the Elijah and Elisha stories and so on. Elijah and Elisha operate in Northern Israel where Baalism is rampant; the people do not have any sanctuary that is orthodox even to go to. It is like living in a place where there is no church or something. You can kind of give it that analogy. When people have shared, true beliefs there is a unity there that is more powerful even than political division.

E. Social oppression. When the kingship gets too powerful, the kings do what most powerful people do, they fall prey to temptation and use their power badly and, in this case, to suppress the poorer people. We see a lot of that going on. Watch for that in 1 and 2 Kings.

F. The power of the king to influence religion. What does Solomon do? He is really the "head of the church." As the queen of England is the head of the church in that sense. Solomon builds the temple, appoints priests, and so on. This is a very significant development; the kingship leading the national religion.

G. But, lots of religious and political instability especially after Solomon's death.

H. A lone true prophet against a host of false ones. That is the story of Elijah. We will not deal with that tonight, yet.

I. Passing on the prophetic office. That is Elijah to Elisha.

J. Degeneration by fascination with things new and foreign. It happened to Solomon especially, 1 Kings 3 and 1 Kings 11. New and foreign and he was enamored of it.

K. Miracles as confirmation of divine truth. That is the case in the end of 2 Samuel, the miracle of the stopping of the plague, the miracle stories that attend Elisha as he builds back orthodoxy in a nation that had virtually abandoned it and so on. These are great themes that one can find.

VIII. Solomon

Just a couple of comments about Solomon.

A. He is, to some degree, the fulfillment of a number of warnings in the Pentateuch. We have especially in Deuteronomy 17, and that is where all these are taken from, the law on kingship. What does it say? It says, "Be really careful, I am going to give you a king but be sure it is my choice, not yours." That is the key. This is the same thing with choosing a pastor of a church, with choosing deacons, elders, with choosing a spouse. "Be sure it is my choice," says the Lord, "not yours." And most people have no concept of that. What do you mean God's choice? How does that work? They do not know how it works that God chooses. This can be a great part of what you help people understand. Look at the warning in 17:16, "The king must not multiply horses or cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses." Solomon did both. If you read those stories, Solomon had more and more horses and large numbers of horses and chariots, the very thing that is warned against. Where did he get them? He got them in Egypt, he married the daughter of Pharaoh, they had a nice arrangement there, very close connection. Verse 17, "He shouldn't multiply wives for himself." Did anybody miss as you read for tonight that Solomon multiplied wives for himself? Anybody miss that? Because they will turn his heart away. Nor shall he multiply for himself silver and gold. Did anybody miss the fact that that is what he did? Now it is not that God was not blessing him. God is the source of all wealth, of all anything. It is God's world, he created it, he made it happen, so any good thing comes from God. All abundance is his mercy. But what Solomon did was build it up instead of using it only generously for the people he built it up for himself. The rest of that is just there from Deuteronomy 17.

B. To me one of the most telling lines in all of the stories about Solomon is right at the conclusion of the very wonderful story about building the temple because there is much good in that. Even though Solomon had some real serious flaws, God certainly used him and the temple was a good thing not a bad thing, a house that symbolizes the presence of God among his people. That is a good thing.

C. Look at the end of 1 Kings 6 and the beginning of 1 Kings 7. Very last sentence in 1 Kings 6 in reference to the temple, "He had spent seven years building it." And then 1 Kings 7, "It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." Do you get it? Do you get what the writer is saying? Of all the zillions of things he or she could have said, that stands out to you. You are supposed to get the fact that his priorities were more self-centered than they were on the Lord, sadly enough. Was he all bad? No. Did he accomplish a lot of good? Sure, but you need to see that unfortunately on either side of David were people who were *not* people after God's own heart as of course it says it openly in 1 Kings 11. The last thing that I just want to show you relates to 1 Kings 11 where Solomon is kind of summarized.

D. It points out that he loved these other foreign women and he began to worship other gods. In particular it says in 1 Kings 11:5, "He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites."

IX. The Baals and Ashtoreths

I have not got a little projection here on Molech per say, we may have a chance to talk about him further, but here is one on Ashtoreth. I put her along with Baal because to see them both really helps you to understand what is going on. I just want to teach you a little Canaanite theology. We are going to end our class tonight with a primer in Canaanite theology.

A. If we lived in the ancient Israelite times and if we saw Solomon doing it and said, "Ah, looks good. Might be something to it." How would we be thinking about Baal? If we went to basic classes to join a Baal temple, what would they teach us? What is in the membership class?

1. First of all we are going to learn that he is a local deity who manifests himself in various ways.

2. That he means "lord" or "owner," also "husband" in Canaanite, which Hebrew is a branch of.

3. That he is often mentioned in the plural because the various Baals were his various manifestations. Each one was a little different. There were Baals who were good at this kind of crop and Baals good at that kind of crop and Baals at this location. Very interesting how they did that. You might say, "Well that is not logical. How can he be one and many at the same time?" They did not worry about that.

4. He is called, actually, the "cloud rider." That is one of his terms that is used because, of course, he is ultimately a weather god. That is ultimately who he is, a specialist in the elements, the control of weather.

5. So he is depicted as riding on the clouds. We have even a statue of him holding a lightening bolt on this cloud.

6. Thus the weather is his thing.

7. Well, if you can control the weather you can control fertility of all living things because they have all got to have rain. The weather is essential for everything to grow and that makes him the god that you appeal to if you want any material thing. It all somehow relates to in those days where everybody was a farmer, it is the agrarian world, he is it.

B. Who is Ashtoreth?

1. His girlfriend,

2. A sacred prostitute,

3. Depicted usually naked and/or looking out a window as prostitutes did, sit thinly clad at a window saying, "Hello."

4. So she is like Asherah but she was actually widely worshipped all over the Mediterranean world.

5. Her name also in the plural often.

6. Always fertility overtones. That is what Solomon is getting the people into. It is a real shame. It is sad to see it but unfortunately we are going to see much more of it as we go further along in 1 and 2 Kings.

That wraps it up, let's close in prayer. Thank you Father that your Word is so rich and the fact that we can do it so little justice in any of these classes, indeed, in all our study is in some ways a comfort. Because it means there is always so much more there to learn and gain from our lives long. But we pray that we may at least fairly and clearly and as appropriately as possible see the big picture, the important themes, and that we will always see the three levels of each story. That individual story in its broader context and within the wonderful story of the redemption of Christ. We thank you for the chance to see it that way. In his name, Amen.

Psalms

Please join me in prayer. Father, we pray that as we take a look tonight at the books that we call the poetical books of the Old Testament the result will be for us a greater appreciation of the breadth and depth of your word. Especially as we think about wisdom literature and what that is and how wisdom is a concept so distorted in our own day, may we have some ammunition with which to help people think in a more Christ-like manner in a more biblical way. We ask for his sake, that of our Savior Christ, Amen.

Any questions before we begin, of course not.

I. Ten Types

This is a little overview of the ten types of Psalms. In several ways this is repetitious. If you looked very carefully at our textbook, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* and read the section on the Psalms, "Our Words to God and God's Words To Us," you know that these categories will be useful, but one of the things that every learning theorist says is that if you can say it again a different way sometimes it really clicks and I, therefore, will say some things that are genuinely repetitious but I hope, nevertheless, helpful.

A. First of all, almost half of the Psalms, about seventy depending on how you count them, are in the category of the Lament. The reason I say that it depends on how you count them is this--a number of Psalms are of mixed type. You can have a Psalm that is a Royal Psalm and a Lament, being a Royal Lament and you can have a Psalm that can be in a category of a Zion Psalm but it can also fit in a Lament category. There are a number of possibilities here. But almost half the Psalms are in a category called Lament. This terminology, Lament, has been around really for centuries. It is an old terminology and this is the term that you will most often find employed. What is a Lament? It is a psalm that you pray to God when you are in some way unhappy. In the psalm you ask for relief, for deliverance, for rescue, for help. Because you do not want to have your unhappiness be worse than that of the psalmist, God has well taken care of that in advance. Let me explain this. If you turned to the Psalms for encouragement and for help and the worst thing that had happened to the psalmist was that he had lost an ox, but your problem was you were dying of cancer. You might say, "Does God really understand? Does he really appreciate the way I'm suffering and what I'm facing and the hopelessness of my situation from a human point of view? Does he appreciate my pain? Does he appreciate my agony? Does he appreciate the sense of hopelessness that I tend to feel?" What we observe in the Laments is this:

1. There are basically four types of miseries that they describe.

a. By far the most frequent is being about to be killed by your enemies. Enemies are just about to get you. They are surrounding you. They are laughing at you. They are saying, "No hope for him." They have got their weapons drawn and you are hopeless. You are one lone person and all these enemies hate you and want to kill you. It is a pretty serious scene, not something to be contemplated lightly. That is the most common.

b. The next most common is facing death in general. Somehow you are dying, your strength is melting away, you are horribly sick, and something is happening to you. It is usually never expressed in gentle terms. "O Lord, I have the flu real bad this weekend," is not what you get in the Psalter.

c. You also get confinement. "I'm trapped. I'm up to my neck in a miry pit. I'm deep in the clay."

d. Then finally you also get drowning, some kind of drowning imagery which is really very comparable to confinement though it is not exactly the same. You have several psalms where a certain amount of drowning imagery is there.

Some psalms mix all four, some psalms mix a couple, there can be any number of ways this happens. Sometimes it is a very rapid shift, "My enemies are all around me oh Lord, I'm sinking down deep in the depths of the sea . . .," you just go from one verse to another.

2. Because in virtually all the seventy, there is no other category except these where your enemies are about to kill you, you are sick unto death, you are confined and trapped and you cannot get out or you are drowning. People have said this appears to be what we would call in modern literature "stereotyped language." What do we mean by stereotyped language? We mean language that is purposely worded so as to be standardized. Why would you standardize it? So that it can have maximum applicability. I would suggest to you that the real invitation that is made by these psalms is not to say, "Well now wait a minute, if I'm not either dying or surrounded by enemies or trapped or drowning then this does not help me." Instead say, "That's the ancient world's way of saying, 'fill in the blank.'" I am absolutely convinced, this is not my theory, it is a general theory, but I commend it to you as being very convincing. When you really look at all of these Laments and how they describe the suffering that the person is in with this standardized or stereotyped language, the vast majority about eighty percent enemies. You realize enemies is kind of a substitute for problems. What is your problem? In the psalm it gets visualized as a bunch of enemies. Maybe it is a constellation of problems. Maybe many things are bothering you, many hardships and trials of this and that plus this and that over here. The psalm, in effect, says, "You think of your problems while you talk about enemies surrounding you, overwhelming you, laughing at you, giving you no hope and you will get it." I think instinctively people generally have. I will bet many of you can identify with the fact that when you read a psalm it is not talking about your particular problem. It could be financial; there are not any financial psalms. There is some that talk about, "I'm poor," but usually it is in terms of being without resources not so much financially bad off. It can be family problems but psalms do not talk about family problems. They do not name any particular illnesses and so on. People still can identify. They still sense that because the psalmist is saying, "I can't live, I can't survive, I can't do anything about these problems, they are greater than I can cope with. Dear God, help me, help me, I'm in trouble," that anything from a true life-threatening situation to the fact that the dentist is making you wait longer than you would like is encompassed. In other words you cannot out-misery the psalmists. It is a very fine thing. I believe when you teach the psalms and preach on them it is just a great idea to let people know that here in this verse where it says such and such, that is for them to fill in and to suggest, "Is it a serious illness? Is it a regret? Is it something that you cannot deal with because the person you offended is now gone or the person who abused you is long gone and you are left with the agony of that abuse?" or whatever it may be. The psalms invite you to give it to God through prayer. In that way we say that the psalms are both God's Word to us, as all of Scripture is, but also our words to God. I think also the psalms, in general, are not intended to be only what we pray but they are intended to be leadoff material for our prayers. Many people find that if they will read a psalm or two it will help them to focus their minds in such a way that following that they then pray in their own words to the Lord. So using Psalm as introductory to a prayer meeting at a church, for example, is excellent. To use the Psalm as an introduction to prayers in a worship service is a wonderful device. But to use it personally is also very effective.

3. Having said that I still want to focus on some details here in this concept of the Lament. It turns out that these psalms are not just stereotyped or standardized as to their language but also to a considerable degree, some of them at least, as to their ingredients. This is the case with the Lament psalms. You saw projected there the little acrostic ACTDAP. I suppose there is some fancier acrostic than ACTDAP but this is the one that I think most people can get and helps them.

a. What we mean by this is, first, *address*. These psalms have in them an address, that is, who are they directed to? You are not praying just generally and you are not praying to some sort of cosmic noodle soup, you are praying to the Lord, the one true God who exists. There is always some element, "O Lord, O My God," or whatever.

b. Then what is called the *complaint* is found. The complaint is just a term for whatever your suffering is. Again, they are stereotyped by the four categories that we have talked about. All the complaints are in one of those four categories.

c. Then, interestingly, an expression of *trust*. The psalm is not just asking the psalm is also praising. The psalm says, "I know I can trust you." Very often it refers in some way to a past experience or many past experiences. From the person's experience he or she knows that God is trustworthy.

d. Then there is a *deliverance* plea. That is where you ask, "Help me." It is just that simple. "Rescue me, O Lord. Save me." Sometimes the deliverance plea is in the form of "take care of my problems, smash my enemies, destroy my enemies." It is a way of saying, "God, get rid of these problems, I can't handle them." It has that kind of a force.

e. Then there is also an element of *assurance*. Trust and assurance are very closely related. In some psalms, it is actually hard to tell whether you have got all trust, all assurance or some of each. Generally what we mean by this is the trust sections tend to speak about the fact that you have learned to trust and the assurance section tends to be that you will be delivered. That tends to be the division. The trust section--I know I can trust God because He has shown Himself trustworthy in the past. The assurance section--I know I am going to get out of this because of God's kindness and goodness.

f. Finally, *praise*. God is praised in some way for his goodness, his strength, his ability, his faithfulness, whatever it might be. Sometimes certain elements of the trust and assurance come in there as well. If you think about it, you have three elements that may be regarded as asking. The address to God, "God, God, I'm calling on you." The complaint, "Here is my problem, I'm surrounded by enemies and they are laughing at me." The deliverance plea, "Please, I need your help." Three ways in which you are asking, but there are three ways in which you are giving. You are giving a statement of trust to God, which is testimony. You are giving a statement of assurance about God, which also is testimony or witness to him as part as praise, then openly you are giving praise as well. You could argue that there are three giving elements. Thus, the Lament psalms, though they are quite obviously geared to asking for help in time of need whatever it may be, whatever the need is, they also do not forget to praise God, to honor him, to give him the praise that he is due. We should be praising God, in effect, this is what a Lament psalm is saying. The structure of these seventy says, "Don't forget, when you ask God also to honor Him with your praise." Jesus does this in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name," but then the request, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us daily bread. Forgive us our debts," and then, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory." You have praise elements as well as requests elements. We should always think of prayer as something that is respectful, that honors God, that recognizes his greatness, and that reminds us; we should remind ourselves in our prayers of where we stand in the universe. It is a good, healthy thing to realize that in this big universe you are very small. That is a good thing. That is not bad, it is good, it is healthy. But, at the same time, to recognize that to God you are terrifically special. It is a wonderful balance. It is a great thing for any youth worker, any Christian education teacher, any pastor, any missionary, to help people to realize, "Yes, we are very small in this universe. We are not big shots, this is a big universe and we're just individuals. But to God, we are each enormously special." That is a great kind of balance for people to get. It puts a lot of things in perspective. Finally, note that these elements may be present in different ratios and in different orders. You might get a PADCAT psalm or a TACDAP. Anything is possible. You also get repetitions of some of the elements. So you might get a CATACATPADAPADA . . . A lot of the elements keep surging back in, it depends on the length of the psalm. This is the most common kind and wonderful to appreciate. As I noted, if you look at a psalm like Psalm 3 or one like 12 or one like 22, which is also a royal psalm, you will see that those Laments have this kind of ingredient composition and often enough this exact structure, actdap, but not always.

4. A couple of final notes--these can be individual, a person praying or they can be corporate. The nation crying out to God. Did some individual compose it on behalf of the nation? Sure. But a group can cry out, a church can ask for help, a Bible study group, a family. There are a lot of possibilities for corporate Laments as well.

5. Subcategories

a. I mentioned penitential psalms, that is just a subcategory in which the misery you are in is still generally described as one of the four, but the reason you are in it becomes clear also. That is a little ingredient that was worked in, it is because you have offended God. Your guilt and your sense of distance from God is added to the mix in the case of those that are penitential and there is a strong emphasis on their deliverance plea being a plea for forgiveness and restoration. If that is really what the trouble is, in which you can tell it never is specific but it is always general, you somehow have offended God, then what you are asking for by way of deliverance is forgiveness.

b. The imprecatory psalms are subcategories of the Laments. Let's take a look at Psalm 3. Psalm 3 happens to be an imprecatory psalm. If you look at verse 7, here is the deliverance plea, "Arise, O Lord, deliver me my God, strike all my enemies on the jaw, break the teeth of the wicked." Many people will say, "Oh, good grief, look at that language." Here we have a request of God to hurt people and be mean to them and cruel and maim them. I argue to you that since these enemies, really would come in quotes in effect, that so do the imprecations. The imprecation is in effect saying, "Deliver me from my problems. Get rid of my problems, smash my problems, destroy them." That is the nature of virtually all imprecations. There is one exception and that is in Psalm 137 where the imprecation is in a corporate Lament against the Babylonians as a whole in which the psalmist on behalf of all the people is asking God to do to the Babylonians what they have been doing to everybody else. That is sort of a comeuppance thing. "They are doing all these evil things; you do them back to the Babylonians, O Lord." Generally speaking the imprecations are all subcategories of Laments. It is in the deliverance plea portion of the Lament that you get the imprecation and they are virtually always subcategories of the enemy metaphor, I would say.

B. Thanksgiving psalms, by contrast, are prayed when you are out of the misery. If God has delivered you that is not the point at which to say, "Well, I prayed for it and it came, so what is the issue?" No, of course you want then to be grateful to God. Whether things are going poorly as in the case of the Lament or whether things are now going wonderfully and you are delighted, you ought always to be praying to God and telling him about your current situation and mindset and so on. Does he understand it before you pray? Sure. But does he love to hear it? Yes, and therefore it is a wonderful thing to do and very appropriate. In this case if you wish that you may remember the little acrostic IMART this way. Imagine that you were heading for Kmart but a couple of stores earlier you saw Imart and said, "I am going to check there and see if they have the kind of toaster that I want." Sure enough they do and it is cheaper than the advertised price at Kmart. You say, "That is wonderful. I am so grateful that I stopped at Imart." If it works fine, if it does not use something else. The ingredients happen to line up this way.

1. Format

a. You have some kind of an *introduction* or intension to praise. It often is a statement like, "Let's praise," or "Praise the Lord," but some kind of introduction often implies the intention to praise.

b. Then the *misery* that you were in is described. Remember it is past misery, you are out when you are praying a thanksgiving psalm, you are out of the misery.

c. Then the *appeal* that you gave is described in some way. Now it is in the past so you will read, "I prayed to the Lord and . . ." that is how it will be worded.

d. Then the *rescue* is described.

e. Finally, there is a *testimonial*. Is the testimonial close to praise? Sure. Some of these it is almost the same as what you would find in the praise portion of the Lament psalm but usually it has some kind of a twist to it, some kind of a "I will declare your name among the people, O Lord." Some kind of a vow or a promise that you will continue to let people know about God's goodness. You will not just selfishly keep it to yourself. Because God

deserves praise and it is appropriate that he be praised whether in Lament or in thanksgiving but certainly in thanksgiving. That is the testimonial angle. Introduction, Misery, Appeal, Rescue, Testimonial. There are many fewer of these but there are around eighteen or so of them depending on how you count them.

2. They may also be individual and some of the royal psalms are in this category. They may also be corporate and some hymns also are pretty much sharing the concept of the thanksgiving psalm and the hymn at the same time.

C. A third category, certainly very common, are hymns. Here we use the outline SRR. Very simple.

1. Format

a. First of all you have a *summons*. The summons may be something like, "Praise the Lord," or "Let us praise the Lord," or "Let all God's people praise him."

b. Then you have *reasons* given to praise God.

c. And then some kind of *recapitulation*. Some kind of a restatement. As an example you can look at many of the later psalms and see that pattern. Look at Psalm 149, for example. It starts by saying, "Praise the Lord," that is the summons. It ends by the statement, "Praise the Lord," that is the recap. In the middle are all the reasons. I will talk about the reasons why this should happen in just a moment. The reasons fit into a set of categories that can pretty well be found in almost all hymns. Some of them will be found in combination; sometimes you will have all three. But when there is only one or when one predominates the types are creator hymns, Israel hymns and history hymns.

2. What do we mean by a creator hymn? This is where the reason section, the big heart of the psalm, not the summons, not the recap, which are usually both brief, but the heart of the psalm is going to concentrate on the fact that God is to be praised because of the wonderful way he created everything. You will see a lot of creation language. Bear in mind that creation does not stop with Genesis. In the Bible creation is very much an ongoing process. The new creation themes of the New Testament are just following the Old Testament. The new creation language of the Book of Revelation is all part of what we are in on. We are early in on the new creation if we have accepted Christ, but we are like people seeing the first day in the book of Genesis; there is more new creation to come and it is going to be wonderful and a lot of it is going to be happening with great transformation of the heavens and the earth and so on. When John says I saw a new heaven and a new earth he is using new creation language. The Bible is talking about creation as an ongoing process right into the new creation, the old creation being temporary on purpose. Creator hymns will not just talk about, "Isn't it nice that you made mountains, O Lord. Thank you for the mountains, we appreciate the mountains. Now the trees, oh we like trees." No, it is much richer than that. Bear that in mind.

3. Israel hymns will talk generally about how wonderful it is that God has a people. Anything he has done for his people over the time, anything that makes them special as a people, the way he has given his focus to one group. It is part of the theme of the people of God that also is a huge scriptural issue. We are Israel; anybody who is in Christ is that. Paul says in Galatians 3:29, "If you are in Christ, you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." So we are all by adoption Israelites. We have that identity, we think of ourselves that way, we ought to. Thus Israel hymns are something to identify with as part of our own spiritual history.

4. Then history hymns per say. Is part of the history what happened to Israel? Sure. So there can often be a blending and an overlap between history hymns and Israel hymns as you might expect. Often the history hymns will just especially go through a long sequence. "God did this and then he brought his people to Mount Sinai and then he led them through the wilderness and then he brought them into the promised land and planted them and" It will tend to give quite a review of centuries of God's faithfulness over time. The emphasis is on that review. Again, this is an extremely important theme. Many religions of the world have almost no historical emphasis. The average Muslim worships God primarily by reciting the first chapter of the Quran five times a day. They just

memorize it. It is in Arabic too, you have to pray in Arabic. God understands Arabic, but other languages he is thin on so you have to have your prayers in Arabic or you are not a good Muslim. Five times a day you recite, usually, just one part of the first chapter of the Quran that you have memorized. That's it. The Quran has very little of a historical basis. That is just one religion that is essentially ahistorical. The Bible, on the other hand, is telling this great, long story. "It started here and it kept going here and there were these people and these people and these people . . . Look at the things that happened to them and look at these predictions and so on. Very strong historical emphasis. It is part of what is special about our faith. Our faith is a history-based faith. Our biggest proof of our Savior is something that happened two thousand years ago that we are still absolutely thrilled by and we have no reason to be bothered that it happened two thousand years ago. It did not have to happen after the Eisenhower administration to have terrific impact in our lives. It is just fine that it happened two thousand years ago. We are very historically oriented in what we believe and what we live by and what we proclaim is very much historical too. These psalms fit into that pattern as well.

D. Enthronement psalms, as you might guess, emphasize the way God is king. Now note that I did not give an outline for them. I did not give a list of ingredients. That is because the enthronement psalms really are not characterized by a structure as much as by their vocabulary. So they could have a great variety of structures but there will always be something about, "O Lord, you are enthroned over the universe," or "You're enthroned on the praises of your people," or "Lord, your throne sits in the heavens . . ." Always that way of saying that God is king.

E. It is an important reminder because there are also royal psalms. What do these psalms do? The answer is they do what Romans 13 does in the New Testament; they praise God for human government. These psalms talk about how good it is to have a king. You know if you read the book of Judges and you followed the arguments there, implicitly always being made, there is no open, logical argument, there is just the statement, "There was no king in those days," you see how important the kingship is. You see the kingship even though it comes with Saul, imperfect as he is and imperfect as David and Solomon are there is still something there of how good God can be, how protective he can be, how beneficial he can be for his people via a king. These royal psalms basically say, "God preserve our king, bless our king, encourage our king." Now an additional factor. In biblical theology every office holder of an important office in the Old Testament is, in a certain sense, priming you, preparing you to conceptually be ready for a comparable office holder in the New Testament. What office holders are there in the New Testament? Of course there are apostles and there are prophets and there are teachers and so on but the great office holder is Christ himself. Many of you have heard the expression that Christ is prophet, priest, and king, because he is. He functions as a prophet, he is a preacher of the Word of God, in fact he is generating his own truth. He is also a priest in that he brings us to God. That is the job of a priest, represent the people to God and finally he is king and will be king forever over all things. This is what God has decided to do through his Son. Prophecy, we will talk more about as time goes by and the priesthood, some bits more. Kingship, this comes up right here in the psalms. It turns out that the royal psalms as they talk about the king and the things God can do for a king and the concerns for a king, etc., have in them much language that also points to the ultimate king. Sometimes they have in them even language that does not appear to be very relevant to any earthly king, any actual human king. Some of the psalms talk about, like Psalm 110, which is a royal psalm, "I've made you a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek was a priest who was a king or a king who was a priest. You can read the story back in Genesis 14. You say, "What sense does that make? What Israelite would ever have been made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek? It seems to be about a king and so on." That is the kind of thing that sometimes is in these royal psalms. Language that does not seem appropriate in its own day, but that has enormous applicability once you see the person of Christ, who, like Melchizedek, is not of the tribe of Levi, not of the descendancy of Aaron but, in fact, kind of comes out of the blue, and yet, is the greatest of all priests because Abraham, the greatest of the patriarchs, gives him tithes and shows his worship of him and his allegiance to and support of him. I should qualify what I mean by worship. Abraham honors him, in that sense worship. I do not mean that Abraham thought of Melchizedek the man as a god. Please understand that. Royal psalms can also be Messianic, predictive of Christ and many of them are.

F. Zion psalms have often a hymn format, the SRR format. Their special focus is on God's presence among his people, which is a great theme of Scripture. In the case of Zion that is the mountain that Jerusalem is built on and the temple is at the top of Mount Zion. Very clearly once Solomon builds it there God has chosen for his name to dwell, he is chosen to symbolize his presence among his people and when you are praising Zion, you are praising the fact that God was so good to be among us, helping us, protecting us, guiding us, allowing us to have a sense of his presence even though it is nowhere near the full presence that one day we will have in heaven. That's a great thing.

G. Wisdom psalms do have a kind of a format.

1. It is very simple, it is X or Y.

2. What is wisdom? I want to introduce it now and then we will talk about it when we get to Proverbs and the rest of the books that we look at tonight. Wisdom has nothing to do with I.Q. There is no correlation whatever in the Bible between wisdom and a high I.Q. You can have 170 I.Q. and it does not have anything to do with wisdom. It has no correlation with formal education either. You can have a Ph.D. and use big words but you do not necessarily have any more wisdom. Nothing to do with schooling, nothing to do with academic skill per say, nothing to do with I.Q. or intelligence as we usually know it. So what is it? The answer is it is a word that is not quite translated as cleanly as we would like. The word that has been used in the English language to translate a certain Hebrew word which is pronounced this way -- *'okmah*, that dot under the *h* is for a hard kind of *h*, *'okmah*. That word really means the ability to make right choices. That is really the meaning of it. That is the concept. Yet, you want in English a single word for a single Hebrew word. This is always a dream, a desire, of all translation. Get a word in the receptor language, the target language, that is equivalent for a single word in the language from which you are translating. Long ago people chose the English word "wisdom" for the Hebrew word *'okmah*.

3. It is always talking about two ways. Some people have even used the term, "two ways literature." Wisdom literature is two ways literature. Always there is the good choice and then by contrast the bad choice. Wisdom psalms are going to emphasize the good as opposed to the bad. Psalm 1 happens to be a wisdom psalm. It is also a Torah psalm, one of the categories we will get to at the end, but it happens to be a wisdom psalm. It is talking about choices. "Blessed is the person who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, sit in the seat of mockers." Do not do that, that is a bad choice. But, by contrast, there is the X now comes the Y, "His delight is in the law of the Lord and on his statutes he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of waters, yields its fruit in season," all kinds of good things. Then back to the other alternative, verse 4, "Not so the wicked. They're like chaff the wind blows away. The wicked won't stand in the judgment, sinners in the assembly of the righteous, but" back in contrast again, "the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but" back again in contrast, "the way of the wicked will perish." In a wisdom psalm you are always going back and forth. It is almost like watching a tennis match. This is bad, that is good, this is bad, that is good; back and forth, back and forth. This is very effective. It actually is a very effective way of giving people basic ethical guidance. Wisdom has this function. It is to teach the difference between what is a wrong direction to take and what is a right direction to take. It means, of course, there are absolutes. You know we live in a day in which large numbers of people do not think so. Tolerance is god. Everything is to be tolerated. Nothing is right or wrong; it is just a question of whether it is right for you. Many people do not believe in any absolute truth. The biblical notion of wisdom, on the other hand, counters that and if you want to help counter it just introduce wisdom literature to people and steep them in it and it will help overcome the nonsense of the notion that there is no absolute truth, because wisdom literature says, "This is wrong, this is right and which are you going to choose." It is always offering the paths of choice. In life we make choices constantly. You are all choosing what to write down every minute that I am talking. You are making choices constantly. You get up in the morning and you decide how long to brush your teeth or whether or not to brush your teeth--I hope you do not decide not to brush your teeth, and which clothes to wear, you decide what to say to people, you decide where to park. Many of the decisions are small but life is just full of choices and wisdom literature recognizes this. It says, "Don't be so naïve as to think that you are not also making

moral choices; you are." We will get to some of the characteristics of wisdom and what the Bible says about them and much more than just wisdom psalms. But there are a number of wisdom psalms. They are really very helpful. They are part of the wisdom tradition that we will see in other ways manifested tonight.

H. Trust psalms are a subcategory of Laments. Remember that in the Lament you had actdap and the T stood for trust. The trust psalms basically yank that T out and say, "We are going to put a whole psalm together just emphasizing the kind of thing that you find in the trust language of a Lament psalm." Parade example, the 23rd Psalm. What do you have in the 23rd Psalm? You first have a description of a sheep that is well cared for by God, the Lord, who is a good shepherd. That goes through the end of verse 4 if you want to look at it. "The Lord is my shepherd . . . I'm in green pastures . . . quiet waters . . . restores my soul . . . always with me . . . I can go through the dangerous valley like the valley of the shadow of death and not be afraid . . . you have got your rod and your staff, they give me comfort . . ." God is the protective good, caring shepherd. Then the metaphor shifts and the shepherd, sheep thing is gone with the last two verses and now you are at God's house. Now the metaphor is that of God as host. This is typical, by the way, of the way Hebrew literature works in general. Rapid, unannounced metaphor shift just happens. Be aware of that. This kind of switch is normal. They expected it, they were used to it, they liked it. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," it can actually be understood over against my enemies, that is they cannot touch me, "You anoint my head with oil, cup overflows. I love this, it is great, I have got goodness and mercy. I'm going to stay here forever; I like it here. Can I stay?" Here is God as the good and wonderful and protective host. It is a trust psalm. It is a subcategory of the trust portion of the Lament psalms. Wonderful, therefore, for encouraging trust. You make a hospital visit, a trust psalm is dynamite for someone who has got serious surgery in the morning. It might be just the right one to use. All of these psalms have their appropriate usage. At a wedding, you probably don't want to pray a Lament. "O Lord deliver me, my foes are many, conflicts arises, I'm weak as water and . . .," you do not want that. Something on the order of a hymn or a thanksgiving psalm or a trust psalm would be wonderful. Sometimes people when they are afraid and frightened need something other than a Lament but other times you can explain, "I'm going to read what is called a Lament psalm." I have gone into hospitals many times and said, "Let me read you what is called a Lament psalm. You will hear in it the cry for help but you will also hear the assurance that help is coming." When you do that, just that little introduction, people relax and they hear this thing about, "O Lord, I'm sinking, I'm dying, I'm near death," or whatever and they do not get panicky and say, "Why did he pick this one for?" Lament psalms or trust psalms can be very, very effective as long as you explain what they are. People do often need to know that.

I. Liturgies is somewhat a catch-all. It is because there is some hard-to-categorize psalms. The term liturgy, which means "words said in worship" is very nice. You have to watch that. But these liturgies do, some of them at least, seem like they might have been general, nonspecific, but general types of psalms that were used to remind a worshipping audience of God's characteristics and their purpose in worshipping him. More than that you cannot say. Liturgy is the weakest, thinnest category in terms of its applicability.

J. Then finally, Torah psalms. There are really two big Torah psalms. There are some other psalms that have some Torah overtones but since Psalm 119 is so huge, equivalent to about twenty typical psalms, it is a pretty important category. Just the weight of Psalm 119 in its massive contribution to the Psalter. Psalm 1 though is a good one to look at in terms of the speed with which we could look at it. Note that it said, "Don't be bad walking in the way of sinners . . .," but then it says, "However, the wise person, the blessed person, delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." That is what produces it. The law is a synecdoche. That is a term I do not know if we have used or not yet. But it is a synecdoche for the word of God in general. Synecdoche simply means a part for the whole as when you say, "You got wheels?" meaning do you have a car or "Nice threads," meaning nice clothing. It is a part for the whole. So law is a part of the Word of God but it really tends to mean all of God's Word. When you find statements in the Psalter, "I delight to do your law, O God." That is really talking about, "I like to fulfill your word. It is a joy to know your word and to try to carry it out." There are the ten types.

II. Preaching the Psalms

Let me just try to encourage you with regard to preaching the Psalms. First of all if you are going to preach from the Psalms and you have got the ten types you have certainly got a ten-week sermon series, just picking one of each type. I would suggest that you would want to do more than that, maybe pick a few of the Laments and maybe a couple of the thanksgiving and certainly a couple of the hymns. But, at least, you have got a ten-week sermon series. If you are going to do a Bible study, at least a good ten-week series covering the different types and getting to know them and so on. Very useful. People love it when they learn these types. It does not ruin anything for them and enhances their appreciation of the way the Psalms work and help them pray and praise God. It is a wonderful thing. I just wanted to throw this out quickly, the Psalms contain rich, rich kinds of things. The Messianic psalms, mostly royal psalms, Christ's purposes. The themes of enduring hardship as you have those in the Laments. Facing death, which is included within, of course, the stereotyped or standardized miseries or complaints which talk about facing death, facing discomfort, facing discouragement, facing disease. Fellowship with God or peace with God as you would have them in several types of psalms. Fitting into creation--a lot of people never even think about the fact there is new creation coming and you ought to get into it; if you miss it you have missed something big. That is what God's kingdom leads you to. All the citizens of God's kingdom are in the new creation. That is a great theme of the New Testament. I could go down through all of these and talk about them. It is a tremendous set of themes to preach and teach from and people will resonate with these. You can say, "I would like to talk from the Psalms today about how to pray. I could talk from the Psalms about priorities in life." There the wisdom psalms would give that. "I would like to talk from the Psalms about understanding history." The history psalms will be a dynamite basis for giving people a feel for the way that God is a historical worker, a controller of history and that history is ultimately working to the purposes of God's people. It is a great thing to get.

III. "Historicizing Statements"

Then finally, as promised, some questions really do arise about whether the "Historicizing Statements" in the superscriptions of the Psalms are to be believed. If you look back at Psalm 3 in your Bible, notice that the statement, "A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom" is not in the same font as the rest of the psalm. It is in much finer print. Notice also that it does not get a verse number. Those are two decisions made historically because you could give it a verse number. There is nothing in the law that says you cannot give it a verse number. The superscriptions in the Septuagint tradition, the Latin tradition, English tradition and so on have been demoted purposely, that is a very purposeful thing, to give them no verse number and to give them a smaller print. It is because of the suspicion generated by data like this. Here's the deal. Here are just some examples that help show the variation.

A. Psalm 33

1. MT means the Masoretic Text, that is, the particular Hebrew that we read everything from. It does not have a superscription; there is just nothing there. Since we get our NIV translations, and so on, from that you will see that there is nothing there in the English as you read it.

2. The Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament says, *τῷ Δαυὶδ*, belonging to David; it is a Psalm of David."

3. The Vulgate, that is the Latin says, *Psalmos David*, a Psalm Of David.

4. There is nothing in the Syriac.

5. But the Peshitta, which is the popular Syriac version says, "A prophecy concerning the victory of the people in the days of Hezekiah" That is a typical example of the very strong historicizing tendency that you find going on in the ancient world. It tells you that there was this victory in the days of Hezekiah and how they trusted and sang praise to God because of their salvation. Somebody made that up would be the point I would suggest to you.

B. Or look at Psalm 67.

1. Again, nothing there in the Masoretic Text.
2. The Septuagint has in most of its versions; there are a lot of manuscripts, of course, "Of David."
3. Vulgate same thing.
4. Likewise the Sahidic, which is a Coptic Old Testament, just has "Of David."

Is this a big deal? No, not a big deal.

C. Psalm 131

1. We had a question about Psalms of Ascents. Here is one where we get "Song of Ascents Of David."
2. And here is one that says just "Song of Ascents" and does not attribute it to David. Even the authorship of some of these is questionable.

D. Here is a jazzy one, Psalm 137.

1. Nothing in the Masoretic Text.
2. The Septuagint said it is Davidic.
3. The Septuagint Lucianic says, "Of David, from Jeremiah."
4. The Vulgate, the Latin says the same thing.
5. The Old Syriac has nothing.
6. The Peshitta has a "Prophecy concerning the people who are in Babylon and how they await their harm and trouble," and so on.

These are samples. We could spend a lot of exciting time tonight talking about superscription variation in the Psalter but suffice it to say I have just showed you the tip of the iceberg in terms of how problematic it is to trust in those. That is what leads me to say we should be real cautious on these historicizing notes. I think you will find that a majority of scholars will advise you the same way; not all, many take it very seriously. I think it should be taken with great caution. That would be my answer to the question.

Proverbs

I. Overview

Now we are shifting gears to talk about Proverbs. Not totally shifting gears because we have already talked about the idea of wisdom. Here is a quick overview of Proverbs in terms of how the book is structured.

A. Importance of Wisdom (1-9): Nine chapters have in them some short and long poems about the importance of seeking wisdom. You just want to get a sense of the right choices and the wrong choices. If you do not have that, how are you going to make the right choices? As we will see the right choices always start with believing in God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, says Proverbs. A crucial statement.

B. Proverbs of Solomon (10-22): Then you have some Proverbs of Solomon, the biggest, single chunk in the book.

C. Words of the Wise (22-24): Then, interestingly, a section that is just called "Words of the Wise." Words of people who thought a lot about and taught a lot about making right choices.

D. More Words of the Wise (24:23-34): Then more of those for twelve verses.

E. More Proverbs of Solomon (25-29): Then another big chunk, more Proverbs of Solomon.

F. Words of Agur (30): Then the words of Agur.

G. Words of Lemuel (31:1-9): The words of Lemuel. Agur and Lemuel are both called kings. If you look in the books of 1 and 2 Kings you will look in vain for Agur and Lemuel, because they are Arab kings. You might then say, "Wait a minute. What are Arab kings doing contributing to the Bible? The answer is: this is something about Proverbs you need to appreciate. Solomon was probably much more a collector than an author in the sense of actually making up Proverbs. Did he make up many? Sure, undoubtedly made up many; more than anybody else, but he basically was a collector. God inspired him and if there were others who had any role to play in collecting the book, and there may have been, because there is a reference at one point in Proverbs to proverbs collected by "Hezekiah's men." Hezekiah comes at the end of the eighth century so he is at least one hundred and fifty years after Solomon. If some good stuff about the choices in life was available out there among the Arab contacts that Solomon had. Remember the Queen of Sheba; she is an Arabian queen who comes to Solomon. If it is out there, God can use it. Did Solomon, perhaps, clean up some of it? Did he add emphasis on the Lord, the God of Israel? Sure, but the origins are wherever they may come from. We can spot a very few, but there is a few, little parallels between some proverbs in Egyptian literature and things that we have in the book of Proverbs. Some of those were worth borrowing and putting in a good context.

H. A Godly Woman (31:10-31): Then, finally, the book ends with the praise of a godly woman.

II. Themes of the Book

Look at these themes and let me suggest why that kind of borrowing, even from outside of Israel, really was not a dangerous thing to do. If done carefully, it is perfectly legitimate. There are themes in Proverbs like number nine here which I have ended with the fear of Yahweh, the fear of the Lord that are, of course, orthodox Israelite themes that are not going to come from Arabs; as far as we know, most of whom did not worship Yahweh in any way. Some of the things are like that. But look at some of these themes like good speech, family matters, hard work versus laziness, the rich versus the poor, being proud versus being humble. These are things that are, to some considerable degree, shared human wisdom concerns. In other words, the book of Proverbs is as much a kind of an all-purpose book for living and not specifically a book for instruction in theology that makes it stand apart to some

degree from other books. The special purpose of Proverbs is to bring up young people and to teach them what the choices of life really are. In other words, I would say to you if you are heading into youth ministry, Proverbs is the book in the Bible to help youth get it; to get what life is all about, to get the basics. To learn that you must make the decisions between wisdom and folly. That there is such a thing as righteousness and there is such a thing as wickedness. There is real evil and to know what it looks like. To know how important their speech is. To know how important it is that they relate properly within their family. That someday when they are a husband or a wife, a father or a mother they will have a crucial role to play in the lives of people that will be precious to them. And about the importance of hard work.

Proverbs would not require you to be converted to Christ to get a lot of the points. It really does not. Proverbs is much more, sort of, all-purpose. What is great about Proverbs is you can use it to help raise your own children even before they have made their decision to follow Christ as Lord and Savior. That is a fact. Those of you who have no children yet may have not even ever thought about this. I have had more children than anybody I know because my wife and I not only have had eight, four biological and four adopted, but we raised another dozen as foster children. We just have so many kids I can hardly remember their names. I look at them and say, "You are...?" But almost all Christian parents face the fact that they are raising their kids at one stage or another who are not necessarily living for Christ. Some eleven year old or some eighteen year old or whatever, they may be very far from Christ. How do you relate to them? You still need to raise them up with these basic values, basic truths, a basic sense of choices and so on. They should not be proud, they ought to be humble. They ought to get along well with friends and neighbors. They ought to know how to work hard and honor the boss and be a good employee, etc. If they are a boss, they ought to know how to be a kind boss and a fair boss, etc. Ultimately what you want is that they learn the fear of the Lord. They really get converted because that is the beginning point of all wisdom ultimately. If you want to be oriented to right and wrong, to be oriented to God is the best orientation there could possibly be for having all the other orientations fit. But still this can work. If you have got a youth group or a children's ministry or a Christian education ministry with a lot of kids who are not yet converted you can still use this material. It does not require for its applicability and its value that they have really made a decision to follow Christ. Of course that is ideal, of course it is perfect, but there is a lot you can do without that. I really encourage this.

One of the things that sometimes we do at home is that as we are eating dinner I will just grab the Bible and I will read a Proverb. I will just pick a Proverb at random. Often times it is just a Proverb that my eye falls on, I will do it now, I will give you a proverb like I do it at home. I will say to the kids, "It says here a wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing." Then I will say to my son Jonathan, who is now 14, "Okay Jonathan, what does that mean?" He will say predictably, "I don't know." Then I will read it again. "It says here, Proverbs 13:17, 'A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing.'" Then my wife and I will start explaining what is a messenger, what is an envoy, teach him vocabulary and so on. Then I will turn to some of the older kids and say, "What do you think it means?" Then one of them will get it or get part of it and together we will work it out and then I will explain it, and it is a wonderful statement. Here is a statement about somebody who is a gossip or who is somehow giving false information or conveying things in a way that is harmful that gets people in trouble as opposed to the faithful, trustworthy envoy who can bring healing. When you handle the truth correctly and diplomatically huge amounts of good can happen. You want to hurt people, boy can you hurt them by just the way you say, "Do you know what so and so said about you the other night at Bible study?" Oh man, that is dynamite. Make it up. You could start a thing that would take years to die down.

III. Proverbs are puzzles

One little detail, proverbs are essentially puzzles. This is important to get. A proverb is not intended to be simple to understand the minute you read it or hear it. It is supposed to be soluble so it is not a puzzle that just makes you say, "I don't know; I have no idea what this says." A reasonable adult can always figure it out and explain it to a

thoughtful child or adolescent. It is important to appreciate, however, in the way Proverbs are written--it is much more visible in the Hebrew, by the way, than it is in the English because the English often does kind of half explain it in the translation. English translators look for clarification, but in the original they are like puzzles. They are so terse and they have such unusual expressions and themes and metaphors that often they make no sense. Some of you who have learned English as a second language or have come from other cultures know this. You have heard many things that people say and you say, "What does that mean?" For example Americans say, "A stitch in time saves nine." It is an American and British proverb. We use it that way because it rhymes, it has a nice sense to it. What is the meaning? It has very little to do with sewing. It is not really a sewing proverb at all. You do not have to watch the Sewing Channel to understand this proverb. It is about the fact that from a literal point of view, a literalistic point of view, when a garment starts to unravel if you can quickly stitch it then much more unraveling will be stopped and one stitch in time saves nine stitches. Does it also save fourteen? Sure. Does it save thirty-eight? Sure. Does it save two? Yes. So it is not just nine. But it sort of rhymes to say, "A stitch in times saves nine," so that is the way it is put together to make it memorable but the real point of that proverb is that there are many kinds of situations that will get worse and worse and worse if you let them go but if you act quickly you can often prevent it from getting really bad. The sooner you act with many problems the easier they will be to solve. That is what a stitch in time really means. We say it in kind of a puzzle way. I sure that most kids as they are growing up, even kids who have heard that all their life, the first time they heard it said, "What, I don't get it." So you have to explain it. Proverbs are like that. We believe that when people taught proverbs to kids, again and again and again they would say, "Teacher, would you explain that one too please?" It had to be puzzled out. But you know what is wonderful, if you have something you have to puzzle out, we find this at the dinner table whenever we do it with our kids, it makes an impact because you are repeating it. You say, "Now listen to that first part again. What do you think that means?" You are going over it, you are repeating it, everybody is thinking about it, they are trying to solve the puzzle. This is what helps commit it to memory. Something that is easy to solve just sort of goes in one ear and out the other, which is also a kind of an English proverb; an expression for it does not last in your memory. A thing that you have to work on, think about, analyze. What is the point of that? I don't get it. Why is it stated that way? That is just great in terms of helping you to get the concept and likely remember it. In the Hebrew the proverbs are very, very memorizable. They are like "a stitch in time saves nine" or "look before you leap." They are short, they are very epigrammatic, they are very condensed, they often have similar sounds and cadences and they are put in a word order that you can easily remember. Like, "Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet and who are you." It is memorizable, because there are cadences and so on. There are a lot of those things that we do not have in English but we still have the puzzle factor, the need to go over it, the concept and the tremendous value for believer and nonbeliever alike, which is a great thing.

IV. Context of Warnings

One does have to be careful in the genre. I think in the wisdom literature, the warnings against prostitution, harlotry and so on are basically warnings in favor of sexual fidelity and purity. In the prophets the term harlotry, prostitution is usually metaphorical referring to polytheism. Where you use a term makes a very big difference in its applicability. I was giving the illustration in another class today--suppose you saw in a newspaper the following: Pittsburgh eliminates Detroit. If that were not on a sports page or a sport story it could be real serious. "Good grief, Pittsburgh attacked Detroit and eliminated them with atomic weapons or something." On a sports page, however, it means they knocked them out of the playoffs or out of eligibility for the playoffs. It has another kind of a meaning; it is using language in the context of the field of sports and it is not the city of Pittsburgh at all, it is the Pittsburgh Penguins or whoever it is. It is some particular team, a very small organization, a very small number of people from Pittsburgh actually who work in Pittsburgh. (They are from Canada if they are Penguins.) The context is a huge part of the meaning of something. In the prophets a word is going to have this kind of value in that context whereas over in the proverbs or wisdom literature in general it will have another.

V. Sexual Purity and Choosing a Spouse

One of the big issues in wisdom literature is sexual purity and so Proverbs ends with the advice about how wonderful it is to make the right choice about life's biggest choice from a human point of view. Life's biggest choice is choosing God ultimately. But the biggest choice that people tend to make that they think of as a human choice is the choice of a spouse. You end the book with this advice that it is so important to find a godly wife. All of Proverbs like the law and everything is always in the second person singular but do not think it is not automatically reversible. I think everybody in ancient Israel would have understood that that teaching advised a woman to find a godly husband as well. Just to make the appropriate changes so that the concepts would still essentially be helpful. Choosing a mate is crucial. Then one watches teenagers do this and it is basically who you feel comfortable with in the back seat of a car. That is the decision-making ability. It is just incredible how badly they make the decisions. It is amazing what you see. Any of you who have any pastoral experience know a big part of your time is spent in counseling people who not only made strange decisions preparing for marriage, but are continuing to make strange decisions in marriage. This is the biggest decision of life and people have not always done it well. What do we have at the end of Proverbs? Nothing about anybody's looks. Do not make it based on looks. Nothing about any number of things like, "Aw, she is a great dancer, that is a good reason to marry her." It is about the quality, the character, the competence, the willingness to work hard, the willingness to take care of the family and provide, the willingness to be a partner to you, the willingness to be helpful. It is just a whole other set of values that the wise person uses to make the right choices.

VI. A Useful Proverb

Let me end up on Proverbs and I know there is so many other things we could talk about. Let me end up with a little story about a Proverb that did me much good. When I grew up my Dad taught me a Proverb. He taught me some Proverbs, I suppose, like don't play in the street is sort of a proverb. One that my dad taught me was this--every gun is loaded. I heard that from when I was a little kid because my dad had some guns and that was a rule. For years I would keep asking him, "Come on Dad, mine is not loaded, look it's empty." He would not hear me. He would say, "No, Doug, every gun is loaded." What was he teaching me? Technically it was not true but he was teaching me an attitude about a gun. He was saying, "Treat every gun as if it is loaded." It is something his dad had taught him. This was very useful to me when I shot a hole in my underwear. Let me describe it. I am home from college, I am a freshman at some obscure university in Cambridge, Massachusetts and I am home from college and I brought along two or three weeks worth of laundry, mostly underwear. I have got it in a bag and I come down to the basement with this bag of laundry and drop it on the floor next to the washing machine where my mom will do it for me. Wasn't that wonderful? Talk about a saint. Anyway, and I see that my dad has a new gun in there. This is great. He has got it loaded with birdshot; I do not know that. I look at the gun and determine by breaking it open, Ah ha! There is absolutely nothing I can see. The light at the other end of the chamber, the whole thing is just absolutely empty, you can see right through the barrel. I was seeing the reflection of the light bulb behind me on the nice, shiny end of the round that was in there. If you ever have a gun, all the men in the room know this and the women just have to trust us; this is true. You cannot just hold a gun; you have to see how it fires. You just have to. You have to feel what we call, "the action." You have to aim it, you have to get the heft. You just have to squeeze that trigger and just feel how it clicks. I had it up and was holding it out right against the window of the basement; the window looks out into our backyard, nice, big picture window. I was looking out there and thought, "No, I better not." That came to my mind, "every gun is loaded," as proverbs are supposed to. They are supposed to come to mind. They are simple, they are short. They are not always technically true like a stitch in time saves nine; it could be a hundred, it could be one, sometimes it does not save anything. So I said every gun is loaded and I aimed, instead, down at my underwear and it went off and I shot a whole bunch of birdshot and it did not do too much damage to anything but my underwear; I had a lot of holes in my underwear. Proverbs have that value. The theory is that they are like rules. Why do we have rules for driving on a highway?

Because it saves lives to have rules and to have them strictly enforced. Why do you have rules in Proverbs for how to live and to make the right choices? Because it saves people from miseries of all sorts. Proverbs, in that sense of having these rules that are just generally applicable, is in some ways the most secular book in the Bible. It is not really secular, I do not mean that, but it is more nearly secular. Maybe that is a safer way to say it, because it does certainly have an awful lot that could apply to the nonbeliever and be useful to the nonbeliever. So certainly in youth work, in raising children, it is a great device and I do commend it to you.

Job

I. Structure of Job

A quick look at the structure of the book of Job. Notice the way things are organized. There is a prologue that is a couple of chapters long and there is an epilogue that is not a full chapter, but there is a lot in it. Then there is Job's opening lament, chapter 3. Then look near the end, there is Job's closing contrition. Then there is a dialogue or dispute set of cycles; three of them. Then there is a set of monologues and then it centers into the middle with the wisdom interlude. This is what we call a chiastic structure or a concentric structure. If those terms are new to you, look them up. They just talk about the way you work in from the ends, the first element and the last element are going to parallel or be close in some way. Then the next one, the second from the beginning and the second from the end, will parallel one another in some significant way and you work in toward the middle. Some people have learned wrongly that the middle of a chiasm or a concentric structure is what it concentrates on; this is a mistake. The middle is a convenient hinge of some kind but it is not the center of the importance. You need to understand that. It can be but not usually. So do not think that the whole chiasm or concentric pattern focuses on the middle, rather it hinges on the middle in some useful way. So, what is in the middle of this one?

There is a wisdom interlude that really is not anyone talking except the writer of the book and we are not sure who that is. It could have been Job himself or somebody else. It asks the question, where do you find wisdom? You go everywhere looking for it. The final answer is that it is found in the Lord. He is the source of wisdom. The book is especially structured in these dialogues. Here is what we say about Job in contrast to Proverbs which is monological wisdom; there is somebody saying the Proverb. We say that Job is dialogical wisdom. In this case people are debating back and forth what the right and the wrong are. The point of this can be shown in the following very quick run-through. I want to apologize for this; it is just my way of trying to cover a very big book very quickly. I do a lot of that in this course. That is the nature of what we are doing. We are seeing the overview. This can be frustrating unless you just say, "Look, he is not going to ask this question on the test, there is nothing like this: Summarize the dialogues of the Book of Job." I just want to give you a feel for the way the debate works; just a feel for it, just a sense of it. What I have done is provide a summary of what you can find anywhere: a good commentary, any bible encyclopedia article on Job will summarize and outline the arguments. This is nothing new.

II. Summarized Outline

What we have is a situation where God gives Satan unusual power, power Satan does not normally have. Satan has to ask for it. That is the power to make people ill. You might say, "I just thought Satan always caused illness." No, Satan cannot normally cause illness according to the Scripture. That is a very important thing to appreciate. Demon possession is a type of illness, and Satan can certainly cause that, but only if God allows it. I would argue that demon possession is not possible for believers. The idea that a believer would be demon possessed is, I think, theologically contradictory. That is another issue, I realize, but just in case you have thought that it might be so, at least let me challenge you, to prove it to yourself. Study the topic and see if you do not become convinced. It makes no sense to say that a believer, a real follower of Christ, could be demon possessed based on the data in Scripture. Anyway, Satan has the unusual power to make somebody sick and to control the weather, which he normally does not control. It seems like it most of the time in New England but he honestly does not control the weather.

Miseries of all sorts come to Job. The challenge is this—Satan says to God, "I can get Job to curse You." That is the challenge. Now God will win that challenge and Satan will lose if Job is impatient. He can be impatient, he can be angry, he can be frustrated, he can hurt like everything, he can tell you chapter after chapter how unfair

everything is, but if he does not curse God, Satan loses and God wins. That is the big challenge. Even Job's wife unwittingly plays into Satan's hands.

A. Job - Chapter 3

1. Because she is frustrated, these miseries have happened to her as well, most of the them, aside from the physical pain that Job is in, she says, "Curse God and die. Get it over with. We are both so miserable. It is horrible."

2. Job starts out in chapter 3, "It's better never to have lived, isn't it? If you are so miserable, why live?"

B. Cycle One - Chapter 4-14

1. Eliphaz - Chapter 4-5

Somebody named Eliphaz comes in. Eliphaz is trying to do a good thing. His motive is good. He is well-motivated and well-intentioned. He wants Job to realize something—that God is good and He would never allow the kind of suffering that has come to Job if Job did not deserve it. So Eliphaz is arguing what many, many people argue, what many people think implicitly, what many people assume, what many people you minister to are going to think. They are going to think that you basically get what you deserve. If things go well for you it is because God likes you and He is pleased. If things do not go well, you are not doing the right sorts of things. People link their fortunes in life with their supposed righteous in God's eyes. It is very common. It is almost instinctive, and yet it is wrong. Eliphaz, as Bildad, as Zophar, three friends of Job who try to help him, all come with the same message. "Job, what has happened to you is the result of sin. Please get right with God and God is good and He will take it away." That is their message. They say it in all kinds of different ways. They hammer at one part of it or another. They emphasize one ration or another but they are always making the same point, "Job, you have offended God. Please admit it, confess it, get right with God and He will take care of you. These things don't happen to undeserving people. God is good; He is fair; He is just; He is decent; He is caring and you just have done something wrong." So Eliphaz starts out, "You get what you deserve in life. Don't be resentful, trust God to be fair."

2. Job - Chapter 6-7

But Job says, "I'd like to die. I won't curse God. I've done nothing wrong. What have I done?"

3. Bildad - Chapter 8

Bildad shows up, "Turn to God, He helps good people." In other words, you have got to repent.

4. Job - Chapter 9-10

Job says, "I want to argue with God. Why me? Why this?"

5. Zophar - Chapter 11

Zophar in chapter 11 just says bluntly, "Job, repent and God will forgive you." You know I have not summarized verse after verse, but I have just summarized very quickly. Job sometimes, kind of, talks past these guys because they are not helping him. He knows he did not do anything wrong. It is not as if he does not care about them, it is not as if he does not appreciate them, but he certainly is not encouraged by their saying, "Hey, this is sin you know." It would be a lot like visiting somebody in the hospital with cancer and saying, "To bad, you have just offended God and He gave this to you." Isn't that a nice thing to say?

6. Job - Chapter 12-14

Job says, “I’m worse off than plenty of evil people. There is a lot of evil people doing fine. You guys can’t help me but God can. I want to talk to God.” He often does talk to God as in chapter 14, “God, you’ve given human beings a miserable existence haven’t you?” he said.

C. Cycle Two - Chapter 15-21

1. Eliphaz - Chapter 15

They get very blunt after a while, he says, “You sinner, you doubter, it’s the wicked who suffer.”

2. Job - Chapter 16-17

Job says, “You are no help.”

3. Bildad - Chapter 18

And then he has a little bit of doubt almost in chapter 18, “You’re no help are you?” Bildad, “There is not future in being wicked Job.”

4. Job - Chapter 19

Job responds, “I deserve vindication, you guys deserve judgment.”

5. Zophar - Chapter 20

Zophar, “Anything the wicked enjoy is only temporary. Oh, it is terrible to be wicked during judgment. Oh Job, it is terrible.” They are assuming that he sinned.

6. Job - Chapter 21

Job says, “The wicked often do well. God ought to punish them but He lets them do as well as the righteous.” He is saying that in this life there is a lot of unfairness. That is the point he keeps making. You do not get what you deserve in this life. You often do bad and nothing happens. You often do good and miserable things happen. It is not an even thing like you guys are arguing. They were arguing what some people have called prudential wisdom or, even better, extreme prudential wisdom, which says that all you need to do is learn the rules. You learn what good is, you learn what bad is, just do good and everything will be peachy for you. So, not only do you do what is right but by doing it you get immediate reward. That is extreme prudential wisdom, which Job is arguing against. This is a dialogue in which he is saying, “That is wrong”; they believe that is wisdom and he is saying that is false. That is quite a challenge going back and forth.

D. Cycle Three-Chapter 22-27

1. Eliphaz - Chapter 22

In chapter 22 Eliphaz says, “A good God would never punish a good human. He would help you if you would just humbly pray to Him.”

2. Job - Chapter 23-24

Then Job responds and says in chapter 23, “God’s distance makes getting justice hard. He doesn’t seem to police the world. The evil do just as well as the good people.”

3. Bildad - Chapter 25

In chapter 25, Bildad is trying to help Job. He is now using an argument from ontology, the very nature of God. He said, “Look Job, think of it this way, God is so good that compared to Him you are bad.” He is trying to help him.

4. Job - Chapter 26-27

Job says, "Yeah, great advice. God is all-powerful, yet He has denied me justice.

E. Wisdom Interlude - Chapter 28

Fearing God is wisdom

F. Monologues

1. Job - Chapter 29-31

Job has his final words in the dialogue, "I was upright, I lived a good life, worthless people make fun of me now. My hopes for life are dashed. If I were bad I deserved punishment but I wasn't. I didn't do anything that would call for what has happened to me."

2. Elihu - Chapter 32-37

Then a new character comes in, Elihu. He seems to be neutral so you might say, "Whoa! Great, we are going to get some good, neutral advice here. After the fight back and forth, we now are going to get in this monologue of great advice." He goes on for chapter after chapter and basically says, "Job, you're a sinner." He basically rubs it in all the more.

3. Yahweh - Chapter 38-41

Then the Lord Himself comes in chapter 38 and He speaks in 38, 39, 40, and 41, and it is very interesting. He does not say to him, "Job, it was a contest and you've won it for me. You have been faithful, you haven't cursed me. I've let Satan cause suffering to you such as has not happened to any human and you have still refrained from cursing me; you've held out, good for you." He did not tell him that. He does not tell him why he suffers. In the same way that you and I are not told why we get this illness or that illness, why this bad thing happens to us, why that disappointment comes, why when you so much want a child you cannot, or when you so much want something that you really would love to do it does not work out for you. We do not know those reasons and Job never knows. But God instead says to him, "Job, consider the way nature works. Did you create the whole universe?" In effect, Job says no; although he is not talking, he answers, in effect, of course not. "Do you control the whole universe?" No. "Do you control, for example, the hippopotamus?" the behemoth in the Hebrew, the big animal like the hippo. No. "Do you control the crocodile?" No.

G. Job - Chapter 42

At the end of that speech Job says, "I'm sorry I questioned you." Now all God said was, "Job, I'm running the world. I create everything, I make it happen, I make it work, I'm in charge. That is all He says. He does not say, "It was a contest and you did wonderful. We cheered every time you resisted. We thrilled at the things you said. We were delighted. We just watched it all and we we're happy." He did not say any of that. He just says, "Job, do you know more than I do?" and Job says, "No, I don't." That is what Job needed to hear. I would suggest that that is the message of this book. We need to hear and be reminded that many kinds of suffering understood by God may come our way. There will be many sufferings, many difficulties and many things will be thwarted that you very much want.

Maybe you say, "I want to be a minister of the Word of God, I really want to do this," and all you can ever serve are kind of obscure churches. You always wanted to have thousands of people in your youth group and you only have six. There are a many number of things. You many always have wanted to be married and nobody ask you so you remain unmarried. You may always have wanted to go to the mission field and it never worked out.

You many have wanted to be healthy and you are sick all your life. Any number of possibilities. We are not told why just as Job is not told why. That is what makes the book so real. But he is told by God, "Job, do you think I know how to do things?" That is what he needs to get. And his answer is, "Yes, you do." In effect, "Yes, of course, You know how to do things, You know what You are doing, You are in charge." There is a very important little statement at the end of the book that you also need to get. Let me read it so as to be sure that nobody misses this.

III. Epilogue

At the very end of the Book of Job is the epilogue. "The Lord then speaks to Job and the others and He says to them," to Eliphaz particularly, "I am angry with you and your two friends," this is Job 42:7, "because what you've spoken in not right as my servant Job has." In other words, what Job has said is right. Now that is incredible. What did Job say? He said life is unfair; it is. This life is unfair; the Bible says it. Jesus said, "God's reign falls on the just and the unjust." He said it too. There are lots of ways that it is said in Scripture. The wisdom psalms say that, "The wicked often get away with everything but don't join them, it looks good now but it won't be good forever." So in the life, in this world, now at this time life is unfair. Good people do suffer; bad people often do not. That is the way it works. Indeed, in the New Testament suffering is often an indication that you really are following Christ. It is a kind of proof that you are not leading a hedonistic but you are living an unselfish life of the sort that Christ wants us to live. That is one of the evidences that suffering is positively directed toward. So Job has spoken correctly. That is an important thing. However, what does Job keep asking for? "I want to talk to God. Oh if I could see Him personally. Oh if I could be in His presence. Oh if I could have some connection, if there were somebody who would be between us, a go-between, oh would that be great; then I could understand it all." What Job is looking for is the kind of thing that Ecclesiastes is looking for; we are getting to that next. He is looking for some way in which he could figure out what this life is all about. The answer is that you figure it out by what God has in store for making all things right. Job is implicitly waving a flag at you and saying, "We need something other than this life. There needs to be something other than this life, this world which is so unfair, which has so much cruelty in it, so much suffering, so much hardship; there has got to be something else." That is hinted at by the restoration to Job of all kinds of blessed things. It says, "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former." That is a very important statement. The best is yet to come is in effect the message of the Book of Job.

Ecclesiastes

I. Existentialism

Ecclesiastes is next in our rapid run through. I am going to start with something that may seem a little funny and that is a brief summary of Existentialism. It is because Ecclesiastes reflects the kind of outlook that you have in the philosophical stance called Existentialism. Existentialism says, in effect, that this life is all there is; there is no after life and there is no God. Does all Existentialism say that? No, there is also theistic existentialism of the kind represented by Kierkegaard.

A. Theistic Existentialism

But Kierkegaard himself, the melancholy Dane, says that we must live life as if there were no God because we do not get from Him a lot of direct guidance. He felt lonely and estranged from God and believed that was our real situation. Yes, God exists and He created everything, but He does not have a lot of methods by which we can reach Him and touch Him and know Him personally. You must live with a lot of doubt, a lot of uncertainty and so “You work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” He loved that verse from Paul and made it into what Paul did not mean by it. Paul said, “You be careful to stay with Christ. You be afraid that you do anything to jeopardize your salvation.” Kierkegaard took that to mean, “You have to figure out your salvation and you do it with fear and trembling because you never know.” There is a lot of uncertainty.

B. Dostoevsky and Nietzsche

Dostoevsky said it this way, “If God didn’t exist, everything would be permitted.” If there is no God, and there is no heaven and no life after death and so on, you could do anything you want; you just live. Nietzsche said, “God is dead.” He did not mean by that that there was a God who was alive. He meant we do not do philosophy anymore with God in mind. We are working out how to live, how to think, how to act without the presumption that God is the one who sets the value system.

C. “Because of death, life is absurd.”

Existentialism in general says, “Because of death, life is absurd.” What does that mean? Think of it this way, you can say, “I’m going to live a great and wonderful life. I’m going to do everything, I’m going to be kind to people, I’m going to be good, I am never going to put bubblegum under anybody’s seat. I’m going to be the nicest person I can think of,” and go through life doing that. If you are really dead, you do not have any memory. You cannot say, “Now that I’m dead I’m satisfied that I lived a good life,” because if you are really dead, we are talking about death now where there is no afterlife, no conscious survival, you are just dead like an ant that gets stepped on, you do not think back because you cannot think at all. You do not have any memory, you do not exist. So if you lived a good life, the minute you are dead, to you it does not mean anything because nothing means anything to you. You are dead, you do not exist. You have no meaning, no sense, no feeling, no recollection, no nothing.

Suppose you live an evil life. You tripped little old ladies waiting to cross the street, you put bubblegum down people’s necks, you do everything, all kinds of evil. You plow into crowds with pickup trucks. When you are dead, it does not matter. You do not say, “Oh, what a lousy life I lived.” You do not think anything because you do not think, you do not remember, you are nothing. In the Existentialist system people say, “Wait a minute, once you are dead, life does not count at all, it is absurd, it is not meaningful.” Since all of us are going to die and will be, soon enough, in that state of nothingness; it does not matter how we live, life is simply absurd. You cannot say there is such a thing as a good life or a bad life. You can only say there is an authentic life. The one thing a true full-blown, committed Existentialist, will say, “You can live authentically,” that is, you can have some satisfaction

now, at this moment, at this point of existence in doing what is authentic to you.” That gets variously defined. But they will not usually say what is right or what is wrong. They will say what is authentic. It is a purposeful use of a term to avoid making real value judgments. Ecclesiastes tends to say that.

II. Summary

Here is again a very rapid, zippy, kind of quick summary. Again and again Ecclesiastes says that things are meaningless.

A. Chapter 1

Things are meaningless, death makes life absurd, and wisdom yields only disappointment. What a thing to say in a wisdom book at the end of chapter one.

B. Chapter 2

Pleasures, projects, meaningless, wisdom, and folly. Death makes life and work meaningless.

C. Chapter 3

It is fatalistic, it uses authentic living language. What happens happens. And, animals and humans are alike.

D. Chapter 4

There is meaninglessness in oppression, envy, materialism success, career, anything like that.

E. Chapter 5

Authentic living, do it. It emphasizes trying to enjoy the time while you are young, that kind of language. Eat, drink and be merry sort of language. That is all ways of saying be authentic. There is no absolute, ultimate right or wrong. Political power or wealth are meaningless.

F. Chapter 6

Even divine blessing, wealth and long life are meaningless; they are futile. Both proverbial and speculative wisdom are futile. In other words, the Book of Proverbs and the Book of Job are useless.

G. Not Meaningless At All

Then all of a sudden you come to this at the end of the book, and I would argue that you come to this at the end of Ecclesiastes because the writer just does not want you to miss what is going on here, just to be sure nobody misunderstands what the writer has done. This is the very last chapter, 12, 13, and 14. “Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion. I’ve said everything I want to say, let me be sure you get this conclusion.” “Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole purpose of man,” or whole duty of man, “for God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil.” The choices do count. The idea then is that there is a judgment and everything will be judged. It is not meaningless at all.

III. Foils

So what has the writer done? The writer has given us what in literature we call a *foil*.

A. Tempting, misleading alternatives

A foil is a tempting, misleading alternative. In a murder mystery, you know a type of literature, a play, or a novel, there is a lot of foils built in. You are not supposed to know who did it in chapter two and just read along until they catch the person. You are supposed to wonder, "I wonder who did it." You are supposed to suspect the nurse for a while and then maybe the butler and then maybe the maid for a while, then maybe the gardener, then maybe Mrs. Alfonzo from next door. You suspect all of these people and finally some brilliant person, usually the detective who gathers them in the living room, explains who really did it. You say, "Yeah I get it, I see who did it." But those other people who did not do the murder were tempting, they have to be tempting, you have to consider them as a real possibility, and they have to be realistic in some way, but they are, in fact, the alternative to what the truth is. That is what Job's comforters do. Everything Eliphaz says, Bildad says, Zophar and Elihu are all foil material. It is all foil. It sounds good, it is well-motivated. People might think this is great stuff. You can take it out of context and say, "Does that sound good to you?" and most people will say, "It sounds great to me." So do many parts of Ecclesiastes. "How does that sound?" "It sounds deep, I like it, 'A time to live and a time to die', wow." But really it is just fatalism; it is all just meaningless fatalism.

B. "If this life is all there is ..."

The purpose is to show you what life is like, what conclusions you come to if there is no God, who cares or is involved, and especially if this life is all there is. If this life is all there is, what Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz and Elihu say really has a lot of merit. If this life is all there is, the meaninglessness of the Existentialists has a lot of merit. What Ecclesiastes says up until the last two verses has a lot of merit. The great use of Ecclesiastes is to say to people, "Do you think this life is all there is? If so, read this. This is what you've got to look forward to; this is what level of meaning there is in your life."

C. Emptiness of life

It really is a description of the emptiness that life is without a judgment and a life after death.

D. Argument for judgment and life after death

Ecclesiastes is a wonderful argument for the fact that there must be and will be a judgment and a life after death. That is its function. That is the nature of Ecclesiastes in Scripture and it is a wonderful book for that function. When you preach it and teach it, that is exactly the way to make it. Just keep examining all these ways that there is a kind of hopelessness, a kind of sad emptiness to life unless there will be a judgment and an afterlife, which then is the sort of thing that makes all of life have meaning. So when Jesus says, "Look, watch out. Every idol word you've spoken will be called into question at the judgment," he is saying this life has meaning right down to the words you say. Everything in life is significant. It will be judged and evaluated on that final day. That is really the kind of thing that Ecclesiastes says as well.

Song of Songs

I. Romance is Essential

Last little bit is Song of Songs. I wish I had a nickel for every time I have had somebody in the office at church say to me the romance has disappeared from our marriage. When you are a pastor you do a lot of marriage counseling, and a lot of people will tell you that there is no more romance; there just is not any romance left in their life. A lot of people have romance in the artificial state of courtship until the time they get married. Then, all of a sudden, there the husband is, just sitting on the couch in his T-shirt and shorts with a bottle of beer watching wrestling. Romance is just gone.

II. Applying the Song of Songs

Here is what is going on in the Song of Songs. I think that this little summation is perhaps the simplest way that I can get across the kinds of points that are being made. There is a kind of a storyline to the Song of Songs. Basically, it is that Solomon is getting married. There is this person called the *Shulamite*. In Hebrew, *Shulamite* means, in effect, Mrs. Solomon. She and he are getting married and there are all kinds of temptations to them. There are temptations for him to just not show up and pay attention to her. There are temptations where she is out and people are trying to dissuade her from finding him or she is worried about being able to find him. There are some dream sequences where, you know how you can dream that a car or a truck or a train is bearing down on you and you cannot move very fast and you cannot get out of the way? There are some of those types of things. He is knocking at the door of her house and she wants so to be in his arms and she just cannot make it to the door in time and when she gets there and opens it, he is gone. I think that in the middle of the book, roughly, they get married. Then I think the end of the book really describes their honeymoon. I have not proved it just by asserting it, but the commentary on the Song of Songs in a series called *The New American Commentary* written by our own Professor Garrett, does a good job of outlining the story progression. You will see in that book some details that are just a little bit different from the way I have said it here, but basically we are agreed that there is a story of courtship, marriage, and then honeymoon. Throughout everything romance is emphasized. What do we have going on in our day? There are a lot of “sex therapists” and there are a lot of people thinking that happiness comes in a lot of sex. You know that. Most of you know that in the colleges you went to and the cultures that we are in, a lot of people are thinking, “That’s just great, that’s really smart.”

A. True love is exclusive and faithful

What is incredible is this—almost every study that has ever been done that has looked at happiness in marriage has come up with the same conclusion and astoundingly so; the narrow, conservative, religious people, Catholic or Protestant or whatever, who are dead against adultery and dead against premarital sex and any extramarital sex, have the happiest sex life. They report incredibly that they are absolutely happy, “I’ve never had sex with anybody but this person here, and I’m just as happy about it as I can be.” That is the way they report it. The people who are having all the sex that they possibly can have usually report they are not really very happy; they are constantly looking for happiness and they are not finding it. What the Song says is that there is happiness in being exclusive and being faithful.

B. True love is staying attracted to one person

True love means that you stay attracted to one person. Sure, for short periods of time, of course it would be easy to let yourself be tempted to be more attracted to one person or another.

C. True love is acting like the two of you are one flesh

There is a lot of that in the Song, a lot of the way they work together.

D. True love leads to sex only in marriage

E. True love preserves romance in marriage

F. True love is pure and permanent

What is going on here is the story of just being together; how sharing activities, sharing values, and so on is what counts. There is nothing about sexual technique, there is nothing about sexual frequency; those things are not important. It is the romance that counts. In support of this, there are a lot of things in the Song that might seem kind of weird. You have descriptions about each other and they say things about each other that, to us, sound kind of funny. How can it be that people would use these sorts of comparisons? “Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn coming up from the washing, each one has a twin, not one of them is alone.” Gee, a double set of teeth, is that what this is? Is it braces, what is it? “Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon. Your mouth is level. Your temples behind your veil are like halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David,” that is a long neck, “built with elegance, on it hang a thousand shields; all of them shields of warriors.” What is this? Is it zits or something? I do not get it. So, we might say weird descriptions. In every case what is going on this—when I look at you I see what is special, what is dignified, what is grand, what is beautiful and compares to anything you would love to look at that is just delightful to see.

III. Comparison to Modern Love Songs

Here are some comparisons. I took some show tunes, you could find this in any kind of literature, but I happened to have access to the lyrics of some show tunes. Here is one, “You’re the top, you’re the Coliseum. / You’re the top, you’re the Louvre Museum,” and so on. “I’m a worthless check, a total wreck, a flop. / But if, baby, I’m the bottom, you’re the top! / You’re the cream in my coffee, you’re the salt in my stew. / You’re the starch in my collar, You’re the lace in my shoe,” people actually wrote these lyrics, “ You’re the sail of my love boat, you’re the captain and crew, / You will always be my necessity, I’d be lost without you.” Here is Tommy Dorsey, “You are perfection, you’re my idea. / Of angels singing the Ave Maria.” From R. Rodgers, “With a song in my heart, I behold your adorable face, / Just a song at the start, but it soon is a hymn to your grace. / When the music swells, I’m touching your hand.” That is the kind of thing you have in the Song. “It tells that you’re standing near, and / At the sound of your voice, heaven opens its portholes to me...”

This is the kind of thing going on. It really has many parallels in modern music and love songs and so on. It is a great thing for encouraging this sort of thing. When can you use the Song? You can use it in marriage counseling, you can use it in pre-marriage counseling. Have people read the Song and say to them, “Here is my assignment for next week, read the Song of Songs together, read it out loud, one to the other and get the point that you owe each other romance throughout life.” You may have to do some of the things that pastors have to do; teach men who are getting married that it is useful to bring their wives flowers. To men that does not seem useful. A chainsaw maybe, that might be useful. You cannot imagine, why would she want flowers? It is a total waste. You cut them and then they are dead. Teach them how to do romantic things; teach them how to be tender, how to be attentive, how to be kind, how to say when you come home dead tired, “It’s great to see you, how are things with you?” It is those things that have such power in a marriage and enormous significance. Women have a responsibility as well not to say, “Got any money?” as the first thing that they say when you arrive home. What we have got in the Song is a model of what it should be and written probably for one of his marriages. But the real value of it was lost on him, the value is for us who can, in fact, follow what is always the Biblical ideal, one

husband, one wife and stay together. Here is a thing that puts Solomon in the picture and I think all the more powerfully, in effect it is saying, if only Solomon would do this, if only. He is the guy who should and he does not.

The Prophetical Books

I. Preaching the Prophets

It is often hard for people to preach or teach the Prophets; a lot of pastors do not do it much. Indeed, you will notice that more Bible studies than not focus on one of Paul's letters. Why is that? Because, of course, the letters have that nice combination of opening doctrine and closing application. Paul does the work for you. It is much harder to preach the Gospels and Acts. You will hear the Gospels and Acts preached less than you will Paul's epistles. When you get into the Old Testament, it is a lot easier to preach the Psalms than other books. Natural identification with them and often it is a lot easier to preach certain of the key narratives, the stories that seem to have a moral. It can be very difficult to preach the Prophets and a lot of people find it daunting.

If a pastor realizes that he will have to spend an extra two or three hours a week to be able to figure out how to make a good, descent application out of some vicious denunciation of the Edomites and help people live for Christ thereby, he or she will tend to just say, "I don't know. They like my stuff when I do it on Corinthians and so on. It is a lot of work to do these other books." There is a tendency to want to avoid the Prophets because it is hard for people to see what the value would be. To some degree, this is just a little bit of encouragement, orientation, and pep talk covering some of the things that will help you get out of these books what God has intended for your congregation, class, youth group, or Bible study.

A. Dependency on Pentateuch

Do try to appreciate the fact that the Prophets really depend upon the Pentateuch. They really do not say much conceptually that is not already said by Moses in one of the Pentateuchal books. This is very important. They are saying things that are completely consistent with what Moses says. They are denouncing the people of Israel according to the covenant. They frequently mention the word covenant. They use techniques that indicate that they are referring back to God's covenant law. Everywhere there is the assumption that is they are working off of the Pentateuch.

B. Lack of novelty

Secondly, appreciate the fact that they are not novel. They are not making up new material. They are in a position very much like you and I are in. When we preach to people, we are not trying to make up anything new. We may be trying to say it in a currently clear and hopefully intelligible way using, therefore, not the exact vocabulary always of the Bible, but we are trying to say what the Bible already says. We are trying to get people to pay attention to what has been around for two thousand years. That is our big thing. We know that is where the truth is. That information is what the Holy Spirit will take and use to change people. The Bible is a real change agent. It is a marvelous, powerful tool for the shaping of people's thinking and behavior. We want them to know it, we refer to it, we get our ideas from it. We really do not want to preach anything except that which the Bible itself teaches. This is what the Prophets did.

The Prophets were, of course, more precise in their inspiration, more authoritative because God was behind every word, but they still were trying to get people back to the Bible. they were trying to get a nation of people back to its roots, to honor its constitution as God had revealed that constitution both at Mount Sinai and also in the plains of Moab in the book that we call Deuteronomy. That was their big push. Therefore, they are not novel; they are very circumscribed in their creativity.

C. Watch out for liberal assumptions

You need to watch out for liberal assumptions. If you read commentaries that are critical or left wing, you will see a very large number of assumptions about the Prophets to this extent. Many people still today, it is a minority but still a remarkably strong minority, follow the old view that was made up by Graf and Wilhousen and others who argue the following. They said, "Look, when you read the Prophets they never actually quote a single Old Testament law. They don't quote any of the Ten Commandments. They refer the concepts in the Ten Commandments but they don't quote them. They don't quote any laws about boiling a kid in its mother's milk or with doing this or that with boundary stones or anything. They just never quote the law." They said, "You know what we should infer from that? The law was not in existence when the Prophets preached. It simply didn't exist. Had it been in existence they would have quoted it, right? What is more powerful than to say, as God says in the law, do this? So surely the law was not in existence. The Prophets came first and the law second. Now the prophets preached down into the four hundreds so the logically conclusion was the law must come after 450 B.C or so." That really convinced a lot of people. They said, "Gee, that has to be true. If they don't ever cite it they must not have known it and they didn't know it, it must not have existed."

Then as people studied ancient law, an observation became evident. This especially in a book by two scholars named Driver and Miles, neither of whom was Evangelical in any way. They wrote the book *The Babylonian Laws*, and they noticed that in thousands and thousands of law cases that we have from all over the Mesopotamian world during the days and after the days of *Hammurabi's Code* and other famous law codes, nobody quotes that either. *Hammurabi's Code* we know was made in multiple copies and set up in the center of every city and yet you can read law cases from these cities and they never, ever quote it. That made people a little suspicious. Then careful study of the history of law demonstrated that it was not until after New Testament times in Roman law that the concept of legal citation began. We are very used to it but remember we live in a world where our laws are not paradigmatic, our laws are exhaustive. We have to have a law for everything.

I was recently checking the net for laws on tape recording. I just wanted to check to see because not everybody gets permission to tape record a class or whatever and I was looking into that to see what students I could sue and make money from and so on. No, it was not that at all. I was just looking more out of curiosity than anything; I wanted to find out what the laws were. I read just one law from Title 19 section such and such, Chapter 119 of the U.S. Code, just one law and boy does it go on and on and on. There must be twelve thousand words in that law. It is just incredible. Just one law about that. It has definitions and everything. It has got as much in that one law as we have in the entire Pentateuch in terms of legal material. It was very, very lengthy. It is a perfect example and reminder of the way that modern law works. In modern law you try to say absolutely everything and if you do not quite say it, as we have said before, it is not a law. Whereas in bible times people gave laws as guidelines. These are the sorts of standards and you would reason from them. Hammurabi would not have been bothered that people did not cite his law code; he did not expect them to cite it. What he wanted was that everybody should know what the standards ought to be and extrapolate from them and reason to all the particular cases.

That is what God wanted for His people when He cites His law. It does not mean that the law does not apply it just means that it does apply all the more. As we have said before, it is a paradigm for all the possibilities, it sets the standards and you extrapolate from it with good wisdom and judgment. It turns out that after New Testament times the Romans began to have fuller and more codified exhaustive law and then of course began citing. You need to cite if you are starting to think that way. If you are starting to think that there has to be a law that prohibits this, if we are going to punish this, then you need to quote that law in your court case. So citation developed and became absolutely essential and necessary throughout. Nobody today could ever go into court and say, "I don't like what this person has done and I, the District Attorney, am asking you, O judge, to put him in jail." The judge will say, "Well what has he done? Give me the law. Cite it in your indictment."

Be careful for liberal assumptions about the relative role of the Prophets as apposed to the Pentateuch. That is just an overview of the history of law just to be sure that you get the point. Many people are still not really on board with that understanding of the history of legal citation and you get strange results; people still following hundred-year-old data.

D. Special stress on the covenant sanctions in the Prophets.

The Prophets are covenant enforcement mediators. What do we mean by that? They are dealing with the question, will God enforce His covenant? He has been very patient. The covenant says, if you do the kinds of things that the Israelites have been doing for centuries, He will eventually bring about the curses of the covenant upon them. Why has it not happened yet? The Prophets as mediators, standing between God and His people, speaking for Him to His people, saying to the people, "It is because of God's great patience. He has been merciful, He has given you chance after chance, He has let things go by, He has overlooked things, He is a loving God, He doesn't want to hurt you but the time has finally come, as the Prophets that we read like Amos, Hosea, Jonah, and the others say, where if you think you are going to escape the punishment of the covenant you are wrong. A great, horrible, cataclysmic punishment is coming. They stress those covenant sanctions.

E. Evidence followed by curse fulfillment

The basic pattern in the Prophets is evidence and then curse fulfillment. What do we mean by that? The Prophets are looking at Israel's behavior very frequently from a legal point of view because the covenant is a legal document, it is a law. The Prophets are constantly saying, "Israel, here is what you've done. That is covenant breaking, that is illegal, that is law breaking. Therefore, you're going to have to expect to endure the covenant sanctions," that is the curses, "that the law contains. They are going to be fulfilled." We are going to find that all over the place in the sixteen Prophets that we will be looking at. For now we will just sample a little bit of Amos, Hosea, and Jonah just to get a feel for it. What we say about those prophets we will also say about others. When you read all sixteen of them many things get reinforced and put together so we will just skim the cream tonight. There is a lot more to come about the Prophets but this is a way of giving an overview to it.

F. "Rib Formula"

There is a more detailed legal pattern that sometimes is called the *Rib Formula*. This word, *R-i-b*, it is a soft *b* so it is pronounced like a *v*, means in Hebrew a *lawsuit*, an actual law case. The Prophets frequently do the following—they preach to the people of Israel imagining a scenario. The scenario is that God is the prosecuting attorney who has put Israel on trial. God cites the evidence and says, "Here is what you have done, O Israel." Interestingly, God is not only the prosecuting attorney and Israel the defendant but, in addition, God is also the judge. This is a rather stacked court case, but God is God and He is infinite. He can play all roles. Sometimes God even functions as the plaintiff. "Here is what you did to Me, that's why I'm calling you into court and I'm prosecuting the case."

So God is first of all the plaintiff, then He is the prosecuting or the district attorney depending on your sense of who does what in your state, and He is also the judge. He also turns out to be the sheriff who takes the prisoner and confines him and the warden of the prison; he has a lot of roles. The Israelites have not got too much of a chance. But, they knew how legal cases went and so you can see the summons and then the indictment, the evidence, and the judgment sentence as God plays all these roles in this imaginary scenario where the Israelites are taken to court. It fits perfectly because the law is a legal document, the covenant is law; it makes sense.

G. Prophets are messengers

It is very important to appreciate that. A prophet understood that from heaven he or she had received messages. Some of the prophets report that God even reinforced this for them by giving them the visionary

experience of being taken up into heaven and standing right in the court of God. They could see heaven and have an image of God, which usually all they see is a bright, blinding light in front of them, and there is God and angels around and they describe that scene. Then God says, "Okay prophet, here is what you say, memorize this." So the prophets get their message, sometimes it is called a burden.

1. Messenger Formulae

It is the word that they speak. This causes them then to use language that identifies them as messengers. So I interrupt what I was just saying for a moment to show you this. You know how very often the prophet will say, "Thus says the Lord," or "says the Lord." These things are almost constantly showing up. Some prophets use them sparingly and other prophets use them constantly. You have got ten or twenty of these per chapter, "Thus says the Lord; I will do this says the Lord and then I will do that; and Thus says the Lord." It is just constant. We call these *messenger formulae*.

2. Usually speaks in first person

Usually the prophet also speaks in the first person. "Thus says the Lord, *I* will do so and so." There are times when you actually cannot be sure whether it is the prophet, "I have seen what you have done O Israel," and you say, is that the prophet or is that God? Generally speaking ere on the side of assuming that it is God and the prophet is doing nothing but quoting Him. The prophet uses these terms, for those who know Hebrew you can follow it here, for those who know English, you can follow it here, for those who know neither Hebrew nor English, you cannot follow it. Any of these, "Thus says the Lord," that is what we call a *messenger formulae* or a messenger speech formula. It is the wording that says, "I'm just telling you what I memorized." This is very important. The prophet is not claiming actually to be creating anything. The prophet is claiming that he is saying nothing of his own and simply quoting God. This is what ancient messengers did.

3. Prophets are dictation documents

We have actually hundreds of messenger text. We have lots and lots of texts, where a messenger says in Egypt or Babylon or whatever, "Thus says king so and so, hello, how are you? I am having trouble here. Can you do this for me?" or "The taxes are difficult but we'll have them next week and I assure you, O king, that I love you." So one king says to another, it is always first person because that messenger is standing in for the person who sent him and is saying the words of the person who sent him. It is not quite as neat as those little holograms of Princess Leia appealing to Obi-Wan Kenobi and then fading out played by R2-D2. It is not quite as nice as those, but it is comparable.

You are the messenger and you show up and you, in effect, take the role of the one who sent you and you speak his very words. What this means is that the prophets really were absolutely verbatim speaking God's word. Some of you have studied the question of inspiration and you know that many people argue that none of the Bible is to be understood by that old notion of the dictation approach, but in fact, that is naive. The Prophets are exactly dictation documents. They are claiming to be precisely exact words of God. We may argue that a Gospel writer or Paul would not have been aware that what he was producing was carefully watched and superintended by God, but it is hard to deny that the prophets understood that they had just heard God inside their brain and often had a vision that accompanied it, which made it clear that this was a message from God they were delivering to others.

4. Prophet is messenger in original delivery context

So the prophet is a messenger in the delivery context and then makes occasional references, "The Lord has sent me and so on, thus says the Lord."

5. *The implications:*

- a. The prophet is a bearer of a memorized message.
- b. This is verbatim inspiration.

c. The frequency of messenger formulae may be need based. What do we mean? When you look at the frequency of the times they use, "Thus says the Lord, Says the Lord, O Lord, message of," and so on, you find that the high-frequency prophets using these messenger formulae are prophets who encountered lots of opposition, prophets like Jeremiah and Malachi. The ones with a low frequency of thus says the lord, messenger speech language, are prophets who generally speaking were well-received, had good relationships with the king, were widely regarded by the people and so on. There is almost a one-for-one correlation. Our assumption is that, and I think it might be my assumption because I wrote an article on it and, as far as I know, nobody else had written on this, they felt need regularly to say, "Hey, I'm not making this up. Put you stone down please, just throw it in the alley. Throw it up in the air straight at Him but not at me. I'm just saying what He said." They really felt an obligation, a kind of a fear, that they had to remind people constantly that it really was Yahweh who was speaking through them because they were getting such grief, such opposition, such resistance, and so you do see that correlation. It looks like it is need-based in part. Since there are hundreds and hundreds of them it is worth being sure you understand the concept. Back to our overview of some of these things about preaching the prophets.

H. Visions as verbal content

Do not ever think that a prophetic vision is emphasizing what is seen. This is an easy, easy mistake to make. If you will carefully look at all visions in the prophets, it is the wording that counts. The vision, whatever is described, whatever picture the prophet sees is essentially what we would call a visual aid. It is like these overheads that I am showing now. Their function is to help you understand what I am saying, but what is said is what counts. People have often misunderstood this. It is a basic rule of interpreting biblical prophecy that the primary function of the vision described is to give you a little pneumatic device to help you retain it, to help you see something that gives you a feel for what is happening. The meaning is in the spoken word.

So, you never have a vision with just the description of the vision; you always have a spoken word. In some cases the prophets have an angel who interprets for them. Zachariah has this, he is conversing with an angel regularly, just like John in Revelation. He will say, "What does this mean?" and he says, "The angel who speaks with me says..." so God assigned an angel. That is how he gets it. In any kind of vision there always needs to be an explanation, otherwise it is not the point. What seems secondary, what is said, is always the purpose. So it is the Word of the Lord still even in visionary material. It is not the picture from the Lord it is the Word of the Lord that counts.

I. Eschatology in the Prophets

A word on eschatology in the prophets. The prophets are looking at history in three great epochs. They are describing the past blessing that has been in place until now. Then they are either looking immediately forward to the exile, the great time of destruction and rejection, or they are looking immediately back on it. And then they are saying, "But after the exile is over there begins a period of *better than ever* blessing. The prophets see a blessing, curse, blessing pattern. If you understand that pattern, a lot of things will fall into line for you as you read the prophets. You will see that sometimes they talk about God's blessing in the past, "I've blessed you, I've been faithful, this and that." Then you will see, "Yet, I'm going to curse you; Yet I'm going to destroy you; Yet, I'm going to reject you; Yet I'm going to send you into exile," and you say, "Okay I get that." And the prophets will say, "On the other hand great days are coming." You say, "What! How can great days be coming if, in fact, he just said I'm going to curse you and send you into exile?" It is chronological. The exile is not the end of the plan.

God is always an evangelist. God is always working for good. God always loves His people; He wants the best for them. He will never utterly abandon them; Sure, He will chastise them, but He will not utterly abandon them. He is like somebody who spans a kid hard when he deserves it and then puts his arms around them and says, "That's over. Let's have some fun." It is like it is. So the future ultimately is always blessing. The Prophets look forward to a universe in which all sin is eliminated, all evil is gone, all harm and disaster and tragedy are done away with and ultimately they see the same, wonderful future that the New Testament describes, that the Book of Revelation describes, that all of us hope and long for. In the meantime, God is not going to be a softy with a regard to the curses of His covenant. So there has been blessing from the time they entered the land until the exile and there will be blessing after the exile, but that is seventy years in the middle with the exile, a time of terrible curse. That pattern is good to get; if you get it, a lot of things become clear.

J. Personalizing, church-state confusion

Watch out for church-state personalizing, self-interested, localizing confusion. Many, many times when I have taught on the Prophets I will explain what is going on and someone will come up to me and say, "Do you think this verse here in Ezekiel refers to...", and then they will name some current event. "Is this predicting the Columbine massacre right here where it says this?" and it will be something like terror in streets or something and they will ask, "Do you think that is what it is?" There is a strong tendency on the part of people to want these prophecies, kind of self-centeredly, to apply to us right now and specifically to us. Not generally to us right now along with others over a big period of time, but directly and specifically to only us; the prophecy would not have applied ten years ago, maybe it will not apply ten years from now, but it is for us right now. There is a lot of tendency to do that; people tend to think that. And, if you want to have a ministry and make serious money, go around the country picking out things that you allege do predict Columbine and the Clinton scandals, and Hillary's becoming senator from New York and so on. People will buy that, "There it is, right in the Bible. That so and so is so good at opening the Bible, why isn't our pastor like that?" You can really distort it because lots of people are doing it. So watch out.

There is a tendency for what is called church-state confusion whereby you have Israel equaling America or Israel equaling the church, equaling Canada. There is a tendency for personalizing this, self-interested localizing it. You have to watch for that.

K. Oracles against foreign nations

I want to introduce oracles against foreign nations very quickly, and then I will refer to them as we go along. In every one of the prophets, every single one of the sixteen, there is some form of denunciation by God of other nations. What is this, does God hate all the other nations or something? That is the misunderstanding that could easily come to mind. That is what people in your congregation or class may well be thinking. "Look at that, chapter after chapter saying I am going to do this to the Egyptians and now as for the Edomites I'll do that, and now for the Babylonians, and now the Assyrians, and I'm going to throw in the Moabites for good measure." You can easily say, "What is this? What is going on?" Let me illustrate that with something from the Book of Amos. Turn with me please to Amos 1 and 2. It will allow us to get a little feel for what we are talking about. As we do this, let me say that Amos is in all probability the first of the prophets. The only big reason for the terminology major and minor is that major means bigger, not more important but bigger, it is the old meaning of the word major. Minor means smaller, smaller coverage.

Same with the prophets, Amos is a minor prophet meaning it is not as big a book as the big ones but it is the first chronologically. Amos starts around 760 BC. After an introductory prophecy about judgment, verse 3 starts talking about what we would call oracles against foreign nations. This is what the Lord says, Amos 1:3, "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not restore it." I think it is important that the NIV has "turn back" and it puts

in brackets “My wrath” because they do not know what is going on, but I think the answer is provided in a very fine article written a number of years ago that says this terms means “restored to my covenant protection”.

God loves and protects all nations of the earth; they are all His. He has established their boundaries at the Book of Acts points out, as Paul says and so on. This says, “I’m going to kick them out of my protective care and not restore them.” That is what I think it means in the Hebrew. Damascus is going to get hurt in some way. What is going to happen? The reason because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth. This is border war, border fighting between nations and God says, “I won’t stand for it.” God hates what is going on in the Balkans and former Yugoslavia, we hate it too, we hate to see it happening. He hates it all over the world where it occurs and he hates it in ancient Israel’s neighborhood as well. “So I am going to send fire on the house of Hazeel, it will consume the fortresses of Benhadad,” that is Damascus, what we would call Syria. Then with verse 6 comes Gaza, a Philistine city. He mentions several Philistine cities in that prophecy and how they are going to be destroyed. Then he goes on in verse 11 to the Edomites and they are going to be punished. Then the Ammonites in verse 13. Then in chapter 2:1, the Moabites; the people of Moab. He is going all around. These are all the nations that circle Israel. He is going back and forth from northeast to southwest and all around the compass points and so on. Then in verse 4 he comes to Judah.

Amos was a prophet from Judah preaching up in the north in Israel. One can imagine the crowds warming up to him at this point. “Hey, this is great! This Judean guy is giving Judah the business. They are always so high and mighty about the Davidic covenant. But this guy is hanging it right in there.” “I’m going to attack Judah, this and that will happen, I’ll send fire on Judah, consume the fortresses of Jerusalem,” all of this language appropriate to ways of saying metaphorically, “I’m going to judge and punish and inflict my covenant punishments upon them.” Then suddenly verse 6, “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.” The denunciation of and prediction of judgment for Israel is the biggest of all.

What is happening? In general, foreign nation oracles are encouragements because these nations that did evil things usually were doing them also to Judah and Israel and he talks about what they did to each other in various ways, but to Judah and Israel is what they usually were doing. God assures his people, “It won’t last forever, they are not going to get away with it forever. I am going to judge them too.” A lot of the prophetic books have reassurances to good people. “Yes, all this evil has occurred. Yes, it has gone on and on. Yes, it continues. I understand. Don’t worry, I’m watching over it all. I will punish appropriately all the evil that is taking place.” For that to happen if God’s people are going to eventually be elevated and redeemed and so on, their oppressors cannot be allowed to continue to oppress. On the other hand, what Amos is doing here is saying, “Judah and Israel also are foreign nations to me.” By including them in a compound, complex foreign nation oracle, he is making the point, “They too have become as foreign nations to me. They are not really my people. I judge them just like I do the Syrians or the Moabites or the Edomites or the Philistines or whatever. What a tragedy that that should be so.

L. Dramatized prophecy

Finally, dramatized prophecy. In a number of instances one sees prophets acting out some symbolism related to their message. This is a good thing, it makes it more vivid, your brain then has a chance to remember both the words and the imagery. When Ezekiel wants to talk about how the Babylonians will certainly destroy Judah and Jerusalem and so do not have false hope, which is his message for the whole first 24 chapters of his book, he does things like build little model cities of Jerusalem and then smash them down.

In chapter 20 of Isaiah, Isaiah is prophesying about the fate of the Cushites. We would call that partly modern Ethiopia, partly modern Sudan; it is the Upper Nile, which is the southern Nile, the area all around below Egypt. The prediction was that the Assyrians would be so successful, so strong, that they would go all the way down and actually exile people from below Egypt, south of Egypt. That means they are going to conquer all the Fertile Crescent, all of Palestine. The Assyrians are in charge. That is a way of saying that this is tuff. It would be like somebody standing up today and saying, “I expect the Dow Jones Industrial Averages to dip below 800.” That is not nice to

hear and they did not want to hear the same thing about what the Assyrians would do. So to dramatize this he did something that played upon a particular word in Hebrew. In Hebrew there is a word *Golah* that means both to be exposed and can mean to be naked, but also means to be exiled. Because, when you are exiled, you are taken off your land and you are kind of exposed out in the open as it were. So it means exposed. It is the standard word for *exile* as well as a common word for being naked or not having enough clothes on.

For a period of years in predicting this people did not believe him and said: “All these false hopes and there is lots of false prophecy, it will work out fine.” Isaiah is saying no, it is not going to work out fine. It is going to get worse, not better. He goes around “naked,” exposed. I really do not think he was totally naked, I think that it means that he probably wore the equivalent of jockey shorts, wearing only a very modest covering but basically stripped otherwise, because he said, “So it will be the Ethiopians, or Cushites, will go “into exile” “stripped and naked”. That is also what they did. They took the prisoners naked so that they could not conceal weapons on them and it was part of the humiliation and shame of being taken into exile. It is a horribly shameful thing. So, he himself symbolizes that and every once and a while, effectively, you see Isaiah streaking.

II. Some themes from Hosea

A. A God of reversals and surprises

There is some wonderful stories of reversals and surprises in Hosea. “I’m going to punish you, and yet in three days I’ll raise you up says the Lord.” It sounds almost like a prophecy of Christ’s resurrection. It really is not, it is a way of saying you will be as good as dead and I will raise you up. People in the ancient world thought of anyone who was in the grave for three days as hopelessly, positively dead. They knew that sometimes people who looked dead would begin to breathe again, they understood there were comas, and they did not understand all of that, but they had a basic rule—three days with no pulse, no nothing and they are dead. They used that symbolism. It is interesting Jesus picks another symbolism because they all knew that one, He picks the symbolism of the prophet Jonah and talks about that rather than the quote from Hosea. But that is typical of Hosea. Lots of reversals, lots of surprises. God is the God who brings pleasant surprises and you can preach that from a book like Hosea.

B. God’s people loved and therefore chastened

If God loves you and you are doing wrong, He is not going to say, “Oh well, I love you therefore keep doing wrong.” That is not what God does and people need to know it. It is good for them to know it. That is not His method of operation. He may be patient before He punishes, but He does not say, “That’s alright, go ahead.”

C. Reliance on human diplomacy versus reliance on God

This is a big theme of Hosea, how the people tried every means to get the Assyrians off their back. Hosea was preaching in a day when the Assyrians were threatening Israel more and more and just did not turn to God. The last person that they thought of was God.

D. The determination of God to redeem a remnant

He will not be without a people. That people may be small, it may be a little leftover bunch from a big, large crowd that disobeyed him, but He is going to make sure that He has a people for Himself. That is His plan. If He has a plan, do you think anybody can stop Him? Who can say, “I don’t like your plan, don’t do it.” No, not to God. As Paul says, “Who can ever say, stay your hand to God.”

E. Ritual, no substitute for substance

That is famous in Amos. “I despise your feasting and all your ceremonies. Not because they are bad in and of themselves but because you’re doing them hypocritically. You’re not keeping My covenant, you’re just going through certain motions.” Same kind of themes in Hosea.

F. Corruption of clergy, a precursor to national degeneracy

Corruption of clergy is one of the interesting themes in Hosea that the priests and the prophets stop faithfully preaching God’s word. It is necessary for the people to really go off the deep end. You get faithful preaching of the Word of God and a certain percentage of people are going to hear and take it seriously and change. When you do not have that, that is when people really get lost.

G. Sin as infidelity to God

Sin as infidelity to God is not just hurting somebody else, not just something you do that corrupts your character, it wrecks your relationship to God. That is what you ought to fear doing it.

H. Sin and political instability

A very interesting way of thinking about the way the world works politically. Some of that is in the book.

I. Divine forgiveness

Divine forgiveness is a great theme of Scripture anyway, but Hosea has a lot of it. While there are more than these, these are just some things that I have listed, I just want to give you a feel for how rich the preaching of these prophetic books can be and want to encourage you to think that they will function as assets for you as you are trying to help people learn the Word of God and become close to Him. You want to help people follow Christ. The Old Testament prophets will help you help people follow Christ. Don’t miss that. If it is an asset for you do not say, “Aw, it is Old Testament prophetic stuff, it can’t have as good and direct of value.” It is what the early church had until the New Testament got written. They preached it. It is what Paul had to work from. It has to do the job. It did the job beautifully in the first decades of the early church. So this is material that you and I need also to exploit an obedience to God for His purposes. What I have here is just a very simple overview. It is just to orient us.

III. Overview of the Minor Prophets

I am going to spend the remainder of the time on Amos, Hosea, and Jonah. We will pick up some more as we talk about 1 and 2 Kings. Some of what is in 1 and 2 Kings during this time period is the sort of thing that is pretty easy to follow. You are not going to have too much trouble with it, so I do not want to talk about those three prophets mainly. I only want to put them in context. You can see from the list that the vast majority of the prophets were southern prophets. You have one northerner who preaches in Assyria, Jonah, and then one native northerner who does preach in the north, in Judah, that is Hosea. Amos is an exception; he is a southerner who preaches up in the north. But I would especially have you notice that it appears to be almost exactly three centuries between the first and last prophet.

It looks like Amos probably preached mainly in or around the year 760 BC, maybe just that one year, and it looks like Malachi preached relatively briefly sometime around 460 BC just prior to when Ezra and Nehemiah arrived back in the promise land. It looks almost exactly like 300 years. I do not mean to say that there is any need to make it exactly that but as far as we know it appears to be approximately a 300 year period. I have not included here the Major Prophets yet, but they are all in here. They are all within this same time period. This was a time of enormous, enormous productivity of the Word of God. The prophetic books cover a very big block. Why?

Because God is, in effect, explaining, explaining, explaining to His people what it is that He is doing and what a huge amount is happening.

This is the time period of the end of Israel which comes to an end in 722 BC when the Assyrians conquer it and annex it. The end of Judah, 586 BC when the Babylonians conquer Judah and annex it. The exile which is the great period of curse from 586 to 516 and I will describe that eventually. Then the beginning of the restoration where the Persians conquer the Babylonians and have a whole different policy about exiled peoples and so on. It is a very, very dramatic time of change and transition and I think we would not wonder that God would be constantly explaining how it is that He can take His people and really obliterate them as a political, economic, social entity and instead turn around and make them a people of faith so that even their ethnic character, even their national character no longer counts much. What counts is whether they trust in Him for what He is going to do with them and for them in the future. That is just a huge transition. It is a massive transition, their whole identity changes. Their whole purpose really is reoriented. It is understandable the prophets are preaching God's guiding words so that people can appreciate them.

The Divided Monarchy

Hosea, Amos, and Jonah

The three prophets. I would like to look at Amos, Hosea, and Jonah. These are all contemporaries. Amos probably 760, Hosea right around that time, maybe 758 or something. But he is preaching; you can prove he is preaching as an essential contemporary. Then Jonah, sometime closely around this point as well. Jonah was a prophet who has this kind of special situation. We read more about Jonah than we read of what he preached. In his case, the narrative about him is the primary thing that is employed. About some prophets, you have no narrative at all, not a word. We just do not know anything about what Malachi looked like or where he ever went or what he ever felt or thought. Nothing, he is not mentioned, whereas about other prophets you have both. Jeremiah, some narrative, some of what they said. The smaller the book, sometimes you get one extreme or the other. You get, like Malachi, only their words; strictly the speech, the typed up sermons. About other prophets, just the narrative part. Jonah has a little of each but it is primarily narrative.

I. Amos

Let me back up and go to Amos. Here is a very, very simple and quick overview. Those oracles against foreign nations including Judah and Israel; we saw that, we read through much of that just a few moments ago. Then four chapters of judgment against Judah. Then five visions and some narrative about him; some biography about him.

A. Not a professional prophet

He says, when questioned in this narrative section, “I wasn’t a professional, I didn’t train as a prophet, I didn’t set out to be one. I wasn’t disciplined by anybody. I was a professional sheep breeder and a fig cultivator.” Presumably he would travel up into the north, up into Israel, on his agribusiness. He had stud sheep and he had also workers who knew how to cultivate the figs. He did this as a job and saw the conditions in the north and God’s spirit lead him to prophesy and he was very effective, but he never went to seminary and he did not have a M. Div. or anything, he just did it. He did it because the gift was there. Notice that finally there is a restoration promise.

B. Restoration Promise

You will see that everything up through 9:10 is all basically bad. Judgment is coming, gloom, darkness, no good news for you; I am sorry, you are all going down hill. But, he does have a restoration promise at the end. Here is a prophet who refers occasionally to the good old days of blessing but most of his emphasis is on the coming curse and then a brief concluding section just to remind people it is not all bad in the long run. “Yes, in our lifetime things may be bad.” Three decades later the nation was not in existence; it was destroyed. But he is saying, “In our lifetimes we may not have anything to look forward to that is very positive, but if you want to know the big picture, if you want to identify as one of God’s people, if you have got God’s interests at heart and you can see the wonderful plan of redemption unfolding, take heart, you won’t see it in your life time on earth but it is certainly coming.” That sense of promise is a wonderful thing that all the prophets tend to have.

II. Hosea

Hosea is a little bit later, a bigger book and covering a much bigger block of time. Hosea preaches all the way from possibly as early as 760 way down to about 720 BC, because he even talks about the days when the Assyrians

have won and there is no longer a king in Israel. They have deposed the king and annexed the country. In the first three chapters of this book there is a very strong and interesting kind of emphasis on husbands and wives. Hosea's own family is used as a backdrop for what God is doing through Israel and doing to Israel. Then there are some sections that are not about Hosea and his wife but all about God and his. That is, Israel as God's wife. Israel is often envisioned that way, as the bride of God in the same way that in the New Testament the church is the bride of Christ. This analogy is not new; it is an Old Testament theme simply brought up-to-date in the New Testament. There is a long section on judgment for the various sins of the people and how these end up breaking the covenant. There is a long section on the certainty of divine judgment but then there is a conclusion on in chapter 14 on the mercy of God. "I won't allow this forever; it won't always be that case. My people will be able to come back to Me." Then beautifully in chapter 14 there is an invitation not to bring lambs to sacrifice or the fruit of the field or the vine of the tree but to come with the fruit of your lips with your words of contrition. "Talk to me says the Lord. That's what I want to hear. I want to hear you confess and accept and so on. I don't want to hear you anymore think that you go through these rituals." It is a beautiful kind of prediction of what the future will really represent and how the sacrificial system will one day be done away with.

III. Jonah

Then quickly moving to Jonah. A student here some years ago had a way of characterizing Jonah. He said chapter one was "sea action". Then chapter 2, where Jonah prays from inside the fish, was "knee action". Then chapter 3, where Jonah finally gets God's commission and has to carry it out, is "reaction". Then chapter 4, where Jonah is selfishly hoping that his preaching hurt the Assyrians rather than helped them, is "me action". You might just appreciate that when some exam comes and Jonah is on there. Sea action, knee action, reaction, and me action. Anyway, what he starts out to do is to try to flee from God. Why? I think because most of the translations do not do justice to the Hebrew. Turn with me to that, because I am going to wrap this up before we go back and talk a little bit more about Amos and Hosea. When we talk about these prophetic books we will be sampling almost always. There are so many of them that it is simpler and more effective, I think, to sample from various ways from them and you will get the full picture rather than to just exhaustively work through each one. By the time we have looked at all sixteen, most of the themes will come out. As you have read them and these things have been brought to your attention, you will read them with a better and better sense of what is happening.

A. Go to Nineveh--A Hated Enemy

Here is what I think should be the translation of Jonah 1:2. God says to Jonah, "Go to the great city Nineveh and preach to it because its trouble has come to my attention." The word that is translated "wickedness" much more often means "trouble" in Hebrew. The word that is translated "preach against it" can definitely mean "preach to it". In other words, I think Jonah hears that God is concerned about Nineveh. Just as he is says in the last chapter. He hears concern and he does not like it. Why doesn't he like it? Jonah is a prophet that we know about from 2 Kings 14. Jonah has preached the destruction of Israel's enemies. He has preached hard in favor of the expansion of Israel's borders. He is out there against those foreign nations. He loves God's people and he does not want them to be hurt, and they are being hurt, and they are threatened more by a huge power like the Assyrians far more than they are by some of the people Jonah preached against like the Syrians or Damascus. So he does not want to hear that God is now calling him to go and have a ministry of compassion to people that he hates. This might be like having some deep resentment for, I do not know, the Russians or something or maybe the Germans. Let's say your father or grandfather was killed in World War II by the Germans and you just hate these Germans. And then of all things, God wants you to go as a missionary to Germany. That is not fun to contemplate. You were enjoying hating them and there is no reason to have to like them now. So Jonah runs away.

B. Trying to Flee From God

How can a prophet run away from God? Really, does he not get it? No, I would suggest to you that Jonah had an imperfect theology. Can God use a prophet with an imperfect theology? Of course He can use imperfect theology. The disciples have imperfect theology up until and even after the resurrection. After the ascension they finally get it. At Pentecost they have got the Holy Spirit and Jesus says he will make you remember it right. They were still confused. Even after the resurrection they say, “Now you’re going to restore the kingdom?” and they laugh. They are just dense even with all the teaching He has given. If the disciples can do it, sure a prophet can do it. Many people had imperfect theology, doubted, and had questions of all kinds. Jonah appears to be typical of the ancient near eastern individual who believed that gods had primary influence and power where they were worshipped, that is where they were fed. Ancient people believed that the one power humans had over the gods was that the gods needed to be fed; the gods could not feed themselves. So the theory was, because you never worshipped without sacrificing to the gods, if you worship a given god you will sacrifice to him. If you therefore could go to some place where nobody had ever sacrificed to that god, chances are the god was not so stupid as to hang around that place because he cannot ever eat. So gods only go, only have power, only circulate where they are worshipped.

So Jonah, thinking that way, assumes that God is localized. He finds out better, obviously, that he cannot get away from God. What Jonah does then is to cause God to bring up a terrible storm on this boat that he is on. It is, by the way, a boat out of Joppa. In those days Joppa was a Philistine port city. Jonah is with foreign sailors. They row like crazy to try to get back to land when this storm comes up that God causes. But Jonah says, “I’m the reason.” He says, “You’re going to have to throw me overboard or you will lose your own life.” So finally, reluctantly they do; they throw him overboard. As he goes down into the depths of the Mediterranean, he says, “God, I really made a big mistake. I deserve this, I guess, and now my life is at an end.” All of sudden something swallows him. After some time goes by he realizes I am not dead, I am alive; God has preserved my life.

C. Thanksgiving Inside a Fish

Drowning was what he expected; he did not drown. He prays out of the belly of the fish a psalm. Introduction, misery, appeal, rescue, testimonial; it is a thanksgiving psalm. It is not a psalm about punishment; it is a psalm about deliverance. He knows he has been rescued. “I’m alive, it’s kind of dark, but I’m alive.” Then the fish actually spits him up on dry land and that time he does go to Nineveh; that is chapter 3.

D. Repentance of Nineveh

He goes to Nineveh and he preaches God’s warning, “Yet forty days and I will destroy this city says the Lord,” meaning you have got forty days to repent and the people, of all things, repent. They actually do. Do they convert to Christ? No. Do they convert to Judaism? No, it does not say that they converted, it just says they repented. They did what they knew how to do. You put on sackcloth and ashes, you say you are sorry, you humble yourselves and there is this guy who came out of the blue and preached this stuff and they went for it.

E. No Thanksgiving Outside the City

Then in the last part of the book we see what we would call a flashback, we see Jonah waiting out in a little shelter that he has built. The building of his little shelter is described starting in chapter 4:5. Now, all of Mesopotamia, certainly all around Nineveh, had been for many centuries deforested. That means that he had to build his little shelter out of stone. There are lots of stones. He had a stone shelter but, of course, unless you are really skillful he is not going to have an arch and a stone roof and all. No, he has got a shelter but he has no roof on it. So it protects him a little bit in the early day when the sun is slanting and late. Then God causes this leafy gourd to grow up very quickly and suddenly he has got a roof. Now that is not bad. Breeze comes through and you have got shade and it is not bad. He kind of likes that gourd; it is a nice gourd. God then causes a worm to

chew the roots and kill the gourd. Then hot weather comes. Jonah is out there, the sun beating on him. All the while he is hoping that he is going to see fire and brimstone come down on the city of Nineveh and he can go home and say, "Boy, was that good to see. Oh man, there must have been 600,000 people killed," actually there was 120,000, but that is what he is hoping, that there was a massive destruction of all these people.

F. God's Love and Concern for All Peoples

Then God says to him, "Hey, Jonah." He says, "Yes." "Are you bothered about the fact that that leafy gourd died?" and Jonah says, "I am!. I am angry enough to die. I liked that gourd. It was great. How come the gourd died?" God says, "You've been concerned about this vine, or this gourd, though you didn't make it grow, it just happened. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left," that is a way of saying they do not know anything about My truth, "and I'm caring about them and also about the cattle as well. Shouldn't I be concerned about them?" Here is the picture. In everybody's sense of value you have human life at the top, then you have animal life, and then you have plant life. That is the way it is. In every culture it has always been that way; the highest level, middle level, lowest level, in terms of the value of life. And God says to Jonah, "You were all worked up over a plant weren't you?" "Yes, I loved it! It was a good plant. I'm sorry it's gone." So God says, "You're down here worrying about a plant, shouldn't I worry about the humans or even just the animals? Shouldn't I?"

It is a wonderful, wonderful lesson about God's compassion for unsaved people. It is a fabulous story. These people do not necessarily get converted in the sense of going on to eternal life, you cannot prove that from the story, but you can show that God has a concern for people "who don't know their right hand from their left". In fact, many of the other prophets are going to reflect that. Do not miss it that there are various subtle ways in which the prophets, other than Jonah, also are addressing this kind of interest and concern and it ought to be important to us. We ought not to miss it and think that these prophets are just self-centered in that manner. I just want to talk a little bit about orienting data for Amos and for Hosea and then we are done. We have done enough to get ourselves started in dealing with these prophetic books.

IV. Orienting Data for Amos

First of all with regard to Amos, predictions of doom followed by a brief reminder of blessing. He is a southerner preaching in the north about 760, we have said that. But then let me dwell on the emphases for just a couple of minutes, how a people's morality effects what will happen to them in the future.

A. The Problem Is Moral

That is a very important lesson. This morality is a great concern of God. Most people in modern times tend to think, What is the problem? Well the problem is education. We have got to give our kids more testing. We have got to do this or that." "I am going to be the education president," says every president. The problem is education. You can solve everything by education. For some people the problem is the economy. For some people it is technology. For some people it is better health care. The problem says God is "moral". That is where the problem lies. Everything else is secondary to your moral condition and that is where we come in. We know something that God knows, we know something that the rest of the world does not know; that the real problem is moral. So that a person that is technologically in great shape, economically fine, fabulously well-educated, and has good health care still is just going to go to hell. But the person who may lack all of these, but is morally right because his sins are forgiven, that is a person whose future is far brighter even if by some worldly standards his present is less bright. It is a whole different way of looking at the world and Amos will help you see it; the problem is moral.

B. Judah and Israel No Better Than Enemies

Then why are Judah and Israel no better than enemies in God's sight; no better than their enemies or no better than enemies. That is really a theme of this book and it is a remarkable thing to see that God's own covenant people should now be in a state where they are being rejected by Him. That is a great concept to get across; a person's sin as well as social injustice; both of them bad. Many people tend to think that one or the other is the big thing. If you are a liberal these days it is social injustice—people are good but in a bad world, a bad society, or are badly influenced by republicans who are wrecking everything. It depends on liberal you are.

On the other hand, some Evangelicals have no sense of social injustice. I cannot imagine that there is any such thing. It is all personal to them. A book like Amos will help you help people understand that there is both the personal and the social and there must be righteousness in both areas; righteousness in the individual heart, in the family, in the community, in the state, in the nation, in the world society as a whole and a believer wants to have both. A good believer ought to pray for the United Nations and its work, they ought to pray about conflicts in various parts of the world. When you have a pastoral prayer, do not only pray for personal things; also, do not just pray for the world and not pray for Ralph who is in the hospital. We need to have a balanced picture in our prayer life and in our thinking about the world and what its needs are. Then, finally, remember God's coming judgment because He is going to spare and eventually restore the remnant by his mercy. You appreciate the coming judgment, but you also appreciate the balance of the remnant that God has in mind.

V. Orienting Data for Hosea

This is the last with regards to Hosea. If there is anything here in the way I word something that helps you, fine. But I just want to talk about the Hosea part of this. Here is a prophet from northern Israel condemning northern Israel. What have they done? They have done what all the prophets condemn people for, that is abandoning God's punishment. So he predicts doom, conquest and exile but also future restoration. He preaches for a long time, a four-decade ministry. His emphases 1) The way that things are so corrupt that the corruption is virtually universal.

A. Israel Guilty of Prostitution

Let me read from the beginning of Hosea, as what He says has often been misunderstood. "Go get yourself a wife of prostitution, have children of prostitution because the land is totally prostituting itself away from the Lord." People have thought, "Oh gee, that is Hosea 1:2, that means God told him to marry a prostitute." No, it is simply the metaphor "prostitution" commonly used fourteen times in Hosea, dozens of times in Ezekiel, all over other places in the prophets and other places as a metaphor for infidelity to the covenant. Remember God is the husband of Israel, Israel is His bride so when she forsakes Him and goes after the other gods and goddesses it is like adultery, extreme adultery where you get something for selling yourself to the others, that is what the Israelites thought they were doing. They were gaining, which is prostitution, where you sell it instead of just do it. This is metaphorical. We do not know what his wife actually did for a living; there is no indication that she was anything other than a typical Israelite woman who did all the usual things that Israelite women did, but not that she had been working as a prostitute. If you want more data on that, my commentary on Hosea in the word biblical commentary series go through and gives you all the grammatical Hebrew reasons why it does not say he married a prostitute. The word that is used is not even the typical word for prostitute. Just so you will know. He does say, "The whole nation guilty of the vilest prostitution in departing from Me says the Lord," universal corruption. So God ends up divorcing His people.

B. Sin Permeates Culture, Judgment Follows, Then Restoration

Then there are examples of how sin permeates the culture, thus the judgment that follows is well-deserved but there is also held out always the opportunity of restoration after the exile. These prophets, even the earliest ones, the beginning prophets, are thinking of the big distant picture. We are going to see as we go along the closer you go in time toward the New Testament, the more and more vivid become their predictions of the great things that God has in store for those who will know him in the New Covenant. There is nothing like the New Covenant; get in on that as soon as you can. When it comes it is going to be wonderful, say the prophets.

2 Kings

Tonight we look at a period of time in which great materials are produced. The whole Book of Isaiah is produced during this time. Such a huge chunk of Isaiah looks forward to the time period after the exile that it is appropriate to look 2 Kings in connection with that time period. It is one of the grandest books of all Scripture and a huge prophetic book. We also look at Micah and Nahum and we are going to take a look at a small portion of 2 Kings and as well a small portion of Chronicles, mainly as a reflex compared to the material that we have in Kings. In so doing we trust that God will be with us. Let's ask Him to do so by prayer.

Father we would love to have Your word better and clearer in our minds. We know that You know how to help that process. So we pray that you will be with us and that will grow in our ability to appreciate and use Your word for good purposes. We ask for Christ's sake. Amen.

I. The Assyrian Empire

So there was an extensive Assyrian empire but it gets no further, no closer to Jerusalem and Judah or Israel than Damascus which is southwestern Syria. The empire of the Assyrians is not at first a big problem but in 640 BC, which is where our time period concludes tonight, the empire is across all habitable regions of the great Arabian Desert, fully including all of Syria, Israel, Judah, almost all of Egypt, parts of modern day Turkey, and a huge portion of what today would be Armenia. It is massive. That is a development that we contend with during this time period. A number of references that we make tonight, a number of things you read in the commentaries, things that you read about in the actual books that you look at are dealing with the significance of the rise of the Assyrian Empire.

II. Tiglath-Pileser III

Tiglath-Pileser III's actual name in Assyrian meant "the Tigris River has provided an heir." In the Bible he is called by just one syllable out of that name, *Pul*. It is a nice abbreviation because can you imagine his mother and all the time she would have to spend calling him home, "Tiglath-Pileser III, come for supper," pretty soon it is cold. The empire is, to a considerable degree, launched into the domain of the Israelites, into the area that the Assyrians called "across the river" meaning across the Euphrates River and what we would call Palestine or Syria, Palestine, by this guy Tiglath-Pileser III.

A. Why Expand?

When he came to power in 748 he said, "We're going to expand." Why did people do that? What was going on in the minds of kings that would make them have this lust for land? Why did they want to grab more and more? The answer is, basically, that it was an economic consideration. When a king comes to power, if he wants to build new temples, they are going to be very expensive. If he wants to build new palaces, they are going to cost a lot of money. If he wants to have wealth for his people and do public works projects and dig new canals, all of it is expensive.

B. Tax, Toll and Tribute

Where do you get the money? You get money in the ancient world from tribute, tax, and tolls; the three T's, tribute, tax and toll. We even have in a number of Biblical texts those three mentioned. They do not all have T's in the Hebrew. Tribute is what money you can force another country to pay you every year. If you conquer a country you can say, "You've got a choice: I'll kill you all or you can send a payment to my capital every year." That was

very popular. It was a great system. It was a kind of what you might call “protection money”. In American culture we have gangsters who go to a store and they say, “You have a choice, we’ll throw a brick through the window or you can give us thirty dollars a week,” so the store owner pays the thirty dollars a week for protection from the gang. It is like that.

Then also there was a regular taxation system. You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem because the Romans were taxing everybody. Joseph owned some property in Bethlehem because he is a descendent of David and that is David’s family town. They normally would be at home in Nazareth, meet with the tax collectors, and have their property surveyed. In that connection Jesus was born. That is what the Romans did just like everybody else before them had done it.

Then there is also a toll. Troops are garrisoned at key points on the roads. If you want to travel off the roads, good luck. It is very hard to travel in Palestine off the roads. So at narrow points on the roads, between hillsides that make it difficult to go around, military stations like tollbooths would collect money.

Basically what happens is a king wants to have the money for grand things and asks, how am I going to get it? He ends up just taking it from another country. The other countries do not like this. Naturally they want to fight and they will resist in every way that they can. The story of the Assyrian Empire is a story of conquering and then drawing back because you cannot keep enough occupation troops everywhere to do everything you might like and then countries eventually say, “Okay let’s give it a try. Let’s stop paying tribute, tax, and toll and see if we can get away with it.” If the original conquering empire is strong enough, back will come the troops and they will conquer you again. You get lots of these cycles. It is not behind the scenes; it just is not always super-visible unless you realize that it is why the Israelites are threatened by the Assyrians and why some of the events we will talk about tonight even happened. Tiglath-Pileser launches it and by 745 BC, three years into his reign, he already had begun the process of expanding his empire and his first military raids into Palestine, Israel, Judah, and other places as early as 745 BC.

III. Overview

Let’s look at 2 Kings where this kind of thing is described because we have not had a chance yet just to talk about 2 Kings as a book.

A. Elijah and Elisha

The first eight chapters are especially devoted to Elijah and Elisha. Elisha comes into the picture after Elijah who is all alone is very discouraged and Elisha is his first disciple and then gradually the mantle is moved over to Elisha who is his heir. In 2 Kings 2:9, Elisha asks an interesting thing of Elijah. Elijah asks, “what can I do for you before I am taken from you? I know that my life is short and you’re going to be my successor.” Elisha says to him, “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.” That is quite a statement to make. How do people get portions of God’s spirit? Could I have a single portion and somebody here have a double portion? Could somebody else have a double portion compared to that person, so it is a four-to-one ratio of that person to me spiritually? Is that the way the Holy Spirit works? Some people have thought so based on this passage. It is really, however, a misunderstanding of an idiomatic way of speaking about something. In ancient Israel the heir that is the heir, the oldest child in a family always got the double portion of whatever the parent was leaving to the children. If there were three children, the oldest would always get double what any of the others would get. The double portion is an idiomatic way of saying “inheritance”. I got my double portion or people might say, “Your dad is pretty old now, I suppose you will be coming into your double portion pretty soon, hey Ralphie?” and Ralphie might say, “Yeah, I’m going to miss my dad but he has put it aside for me.” That would be the way it would be spoken of.

What Elisha is really asking is, “May I inherit your ministry. May I, in fact, carry on your work, not just that I will succeed you as a prophet, but may I really step into your shoes?” Elijah says 2 Kings 2:10, “You’ve asked a

difficult thing. Here is how you will know: if you see me when I'm taken from you it will be yours." He is saying that this will be a sign from God telling you to carry on my ministry directly and unbroken, not just to have your own, but to carry on in my place exactly as my full heir. "If not," he says, "if you don't see me, you won't be my heir. It does not mean you can't be a prophet you just won't be my heir."

He does get to see him. He sees a fabulous thing; he sees a chariot and horses of fire appear and Elijah is taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha sees this he cries out, "My father, my father," that is what the people called any prophet or teacher. He says, "The chariots and the horsemen of Israel." He is so excited, he gets to see him go and he also gets to see a vision of Israel's chariot. This is a great thing. It also means that he now will carry on the ministry of Elijah. How does this work? In particular, his ministry is endorsed by miracles. Actually, this is one of the closest parallels to Jesus Himself. If you look at the ministry of the Lord Jesus, all the Gospel writers will point out to you that He did so many miracles that many people said, "You just had to believe." That happens with Nicodemus in John 3. He comes to Jesus, what does he say? He says, "Teacher we know You are sent from God because nobody could do all these miracles You do and not be sent from God." That is what he says. So miracles are sometimes used by God to give credentials to somebody. I think this is the way it still works today. You may not need a miracle to convince the first congregation that you take, but some people in some places may. It is very interesting how that works. In some parts of missionary activity and so on, miracles seem to happen in greater numbers. They are things that give credit. They are ways that God shows, in affect, what kind of power He has and therefore uses through an individual.

Miracles are also a reminder of what heaven is like. Do not every forget that. The essence of a miracle is that it is a little bit of a glimpse into the wondrous things of eternal life. If someone is miraculously healed from an illness, everybody in heaven will be healed; there is no illness in heaven. The one sure thing you can say if you are a Christian is that all your illness will one day be healed, but it may not come until death and the transformation into heavenly existence. Once in a while God causes it to come in this time, in this place, and that is very exciting. Elisha can use some of those miracles just like Elijah could because it is a tuff situation they have got. These prophets are preaching to heterodox people who are worshipping idols in northern Israel and that is not easy. They have tons of opposition and are giving stern warnings that are not well-received. The miracles help to convince people: "I don't like what he says, but how can you deny that he must be someone from God?"

B. Jehu Massacres Baal / Ashara Worshipers

Then a dramatic thing happens in chapter 9 and 10, a Yahwist northern king massacres everyone of the Baal and Ashara worshippers. It is a vast and wild massacre. This is not necessarily the way to solve problems but he did it. It certainly shook up supporters of Baal and Ashara worship and increased a focus on Yahweh. Sadly it was a kind of brutally produced revival. Although it did not last long, it was certainly evidence of how strongly someone like Jehu felt he had to deal with the dominant Baal and Ashara worship that the government certainly advocated.

C. Focus on Kings of Judah

Then the focus is more on the kings of Judah in chapters 11 to 14.

D. Destruction of the North

In 15 to 17 is recorded the destruction of the north. It is captured by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Its population is partly exiled and partly replaced. You can read in 2 Kings 17 about that replacement, how people from all over other places in the Assyrian Empire were, by a king named Ashurbanipal, relocated into what then became known as Samaria. That is, of course, where the issue of the Samaritans and the Jews in New Testament times comes from. These Samaritans living in the north were neither ethnically nor religiously pure Jews. They had many strange notions and doctrines, and they were what we would regard today as a cult. The Judeans, the Jews,

regarded the Samaritans as members of a cult and did not even want to associate with them and a lot of what happens in the New Testament relative to the Samaritans is against that background.

E. Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah

The chapters that we partially look at tonight, 18 to 25, is a chunk of material in which Judah continues on for a whole century and a half. Three kings stand out in this century and a half, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Manasseh. What is fascinating is that Manasseh is right in the middle. I listed the two good guys first then Manasseh second. If you think about it, you have a good king Hezekiah and he institutes a number of reforms. Some of that is what Isaiah helps to inspire and encourage. Then a terrible king after him, Manasseh, who has the longest reign of any Israelite or Judean king. He had a fifty-five year reign; so the worst guy reigned the longest. Then you have Josiah, the last good guy in chapters 22 and 23.

F. Fall of Jerusalem to Babylonians

Then comes the story of the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 25 and there it is the Babylonians. It was the Assyrians who captured the north but the Babylonians have taken over the Assyrian Empire and extended it by the time 2 Kings is over. If you have a big enough appetite and a big enough risk-taker you can say, "Let's not just conquer some small nations, let's swallow up this huge empire that we've been paying tribute, tax, and toll to. That is basically what the Babylonians did. It took years; it was a terrible struggle for almost a whole decade of bitter fighting but they succeeded in capturing that empire. That is a little overview of 2 Kings and what is going on. The northern Israel is gone and there is only one southern tribe, Simian and Judah together had kind of merged but it is all just called Judah after a while, that is the remainder of the still independent, still functioning and worshipping people of God.

Historical Overview of the Prophets

It is always helpful when one deals with anything in the prophetic book area to understand the historical context. These prophets are talking about what is happening. What has happened, what is happening now and what is going to happen. If you do not have a sense of history, you do not appreciate them. If you do not give a sense of history to those to whom you are preaching the prophetic books, they will not fully follow what is going on. Thus, I think that anybody who preaches or teaches or leads a Bible study on the prophets has to figure out how they can make the historical setting come alive. Often that is for people whose least favorite subject in high school was history. That is a challenge. One of the things you might find is that people will say to you, "I always hated history but when you preach you make it so clear and so relevant that I actually enjoy finding out." That is a challenge, but I encourage you to try for that challenge to see if you can do it.

I. The Divided Monarchy

Putting it in context we have what is called the divided monarchy.

A. A civil war never resolved

Divided monarchy is not a very new term to most of you, but one way to think of it is as a civil war never resolved. Here you have a situation where there just starts, right after Solomon's death in 931, a rivalry. A lot of civil wars do get resolved but some do not. Here is one that never gets resolved. If you think about the American Civil War, it finally got resolved, it was painful and difficult but look at the Korean War and the fact that there is still division. That is a modern example that is parallel to the situation of Israel and Judah, the so called divided monarchy.

B. The nation is split permanently

40 kings - 20 north and 20 south. It turns out for our counting convenience that there are forty kings during that time period; three kings of the United Monarchy, forty of the Divided, and it turns out for our further counting convenience that there were twenty kings in the north and twenty in the south. That makes it a little bit easier to remember. The statistic that that should bring to your mind is simply this, you should be able to say, "Wait a minute, the north existed only until 722 BC; 931 to 722, so that is the north. The south goes on for almost 140 years until 586, yet the same number of kings." This tells you that in the north the average king reigned only around sixty percent as long as the average king in the south.

What that really should say to you is that there is some kind of instability in the north. There is nothing about health that was a problem. It was not that life spans of people in Israel were shorter than those in Judah on average; nothing like that. Something else is accounting for it. That really is true. The north was a story during that 210 year period of rivalries; of usurpations, that fancy word for people being thrown out of kingship and somebody else put in their stead; many assassinations, about half a dozen assassinations; the big Jehu massacre that we already alluded to is another dramatic evidence of political instability in the north. So the north is a very rocky place; lots of rivalries, lots of infighting, lots of internal strife. The south, by contrast, has all twenty kings from one dynasty, David. The expression is used, "The kings who sit on the throne of David". One finds that expression in a number of places. Even Jeremiah uses that expression a couple of times.

C. No decent northern kings, 8 decent southern kings

Furthermore, far more interesting for what you might want to use in your preaching and teaching is that none of those northern kings are good, while there are eight relatively decent southern kings. Six of them are

rather decent and two are really fine, Hezekiah and Josiah. Percentage wise it is not great. Eight out of forty, just twenty percent of the kings are called “good” by God. The expression, as you have read, “So and so came to power then and he did ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the eyes of the Lord.” It is said of eighty percent that they did “evil” or “bad” in the eyes of the Lord. He said “good” of only twenty percent, and six of those eight are modified by the statement that, “It was good except for...” Only two out of forty, five percent, were unqualifiedly good. That explains a lot. When you are preaching through 1 and 2 Kings and you keep pointing out, “Well, here is another bad king,” there is a lot that that has to point to. If the ratio is so high that eighty percent of the kings are called evil, you know something has got to give. This is not going to go on forever. God is not going to say, “Oh, that’s fine, every fifth or sixth king is half decent. I’m happy.” That is not what God is going to say. You can see even from those individual judgments on the kings what must inevitably be coming and that is, of course, that God will have to enforce the stipulations of his covenant. The curses of the covenant say, “You keep these stipulations or I enforce them and I punish you accordingly.” The curses are evermore obviously waiting as you go longer and longer in time through these books of 1 and 2 Kings.

D. Increasing apostasy

There is also, as you can figure, increasing apostasy. Manasseh, who has the longest reign and is rather near the end near the six hundreds, he is one of the worst of all. But you can go right down to the time of King Zedekiah, the very last king of them all, the king that reigned over Judah from 598 BC to around 587 because he made a run for it but got captured before the city of Jerusalem finally fell in 586. He was a very affective king in many ways, very influential. What Ezekiel describes as going on in the Jerusalem temple during the days of Zedekiah is absolute, total, full-blown idolatry, and syncretism; that is the melding of all kinds of beliefs; polytheism, any number of gods and goddesses worshipped; and also pantheism, everything is a god and is alive and has divinity. So people are worshipping insects as Ezekiel describes it in Ezekiel 7, 8, and 9; they are worshipping lizards, they are worshipping birds, they are worshipping everything and it is a sad sight. It is really sad.

E. Rise of classical prophecy

This is also the time period of the rise of classical prophecy, 760 to 460 BC. Lots of changes, dynamic and massive changes from one empire to another. It will start with the Assyrian Empire, eventually the Babylonian, it will then become the Persian Empire. Grand changes that affect little Palestine and the little, tiny portion of that where God’s people are located. The prophets are there to explain this and to say it is coming; they are there to relate it to the covenant and also to relate it to what is coming in the future. “However,” says almost every prophet, “do not think that the massive destruction you are about to encounter because God is unleashing is covenant curses upon you is the end of God’s plan. God is an evangelist, God is a redeemer, God has got a future, so He will form a little remnant left over after all this destruction, raise for Himself a people that fulfill the promises to Abraham that his people will be like the stars in the sky or like the grains of sand on the seashore. There is a classical prophecy that says, “misery in the short run but wonderful, glorious, redemptive blessing in the long run.” Those are being preached by every prophet; every prophet is preaching some doom and some blessing at the same time. Isaiah will certainly manifest those contrasts, the doom and also the joy, that woe and the weal.

F. Heterodox south and north

The south is heterodox and the north is automatically heterodox. How so? The north, first of all, is never lead by a king who fits the Davidic covenant. The Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel says, “My purpose says the Lord is to have a descendent of David always over my people.” Ultimately, of course, it is a messianic promise, not just a Davidic. The Davidic covenant, by its nature, also a messianic covenant. How can the northern kings do that, none of them is a descendent of David? That is strike one. Strike two, they do not worship at the Jerusalem temple. Deuteronomy 12 says, “The whole nation must worship at the place where I cause my name to dwell,” and they

just will not do that. Strike three is that they worship idols. Jeroboam the 1st, the immediate successor to Solomon in the north right after Solomon's death, does something that even Solomon, who introduced idolatry into the nation, did not go so far as to do; Jeroboam created golden young bulls, they are called golden calves, as idols and sets them up in the north, one in Dan and one in Bethel. They are worshipped at these two northern shrines or worship centers as a counter culture. Idolatry is put into practice. So you have heterodox kingship, heterodox worship center (location, system), and you have heterodox worship, in the most obvious sense, idolatry. That is three strikes. Therefore, it just cannot be that any northern king can be called good nor can the north in general be called good.

G. One single orthodox prophet

Imagine that at one time, that is the time of Elijah, only one single orthodox prophet is preaching the Word of God. In a whole nation of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people, we do not the exact number, one person holding forth the Word of God and at various times people are trying to hunt him down and kill him. That is really a very sad, low point. That is tuff but that is what we are dealing with. Some of the themes that we have talked about, I am sure you can exploit very effectively in your own preaching and teaching.

II. What are the "high places"?

The question relates to the statement that is made of six of the eight good kings. "So and so did good in the eyes of the Lord, nevertheless, did not remove the high places from Judah. "High place" is a funny term. It translates a single Hebrew word, not two words, but a single Hebrew word that basically means *a shoulder*. Those of you who know mountain language talk about the shoulders of mountains being high hills. I would translate these *idolatrous shrines*. In ancient Israel all the true, believing, and orthodox worshippers would come to Jerusalem and offer the sacrifices there in the temple; it is the only legitimate place you could do it, you could not do a sacrifice anywhere else. But the Baal worshippers and the Ashara worshippers and so on had a system whereby you could worship almost any place.

There were thousands of these little high places, normally located on a hill, although we do not know where everyone of them was. They would usually be under a tree, partly because both Jeremiah and Deuteronomy say that they are "on every high hill and under every green tree." They are very common. You want to be in the shade, as it is bright in Palestine. A little altar would be there and maybe just a single priest. You might march up there with your goat kid and your family and there would be this priest just sitting there. You say that you would like to offer something and this priest would then say the proper incantations so that the little idol of Baal or Ashara or somebody would supposedly notice you doing this. The priest would then take your animal, kill it, butcher it, prepare it, and cook it. Every priest was a butcher by the way; you could not be a priest without knowing how to butcher. It would not take him long to butcher, prepare, cook, and serve it to you, and a portion would be reserved for himself. The theory was that some of the rest of the animal would then be burnt up on the altar and its smoke would be inhaled by the gods, so the term smell or inhale is actually employed.

That is what a high place is. It is a small scale pagan worship shrine of which there were many all over the place as opposed to the Jerusalem temple. So, when a king did well in general but did not get rid of those shrines there is a qualification—he did not go after what was not good and suppress it as he should have.

III. Syro-Ephraimite War - 2 Kings 16

Here is something that comes right before the little chunk of material in 2 Kings that you were to read tonight. It is background that is quite important. It really helps understand a very significant thing, so I have taken the

trouble to outline it. It is described for us in 2 Kings 16 but it also has reference to, see where it says background to Isaiah 8:23 to 9:6, that is where we get a special prophecy about Naphtali and Zebulun, I will explain in a minute.

A. Tiglath-Pileser's conquests in Syria-Palestine

Tiglath-Pileser, this king that I mentioned, made a number of conquests in Syria-Palestine and this is not the first year. So, by 735 BC he had been getting heavy tribute, tax, and toll for several years. For the first couple of years everybody gives all their money and they can only sort of survive. After a while you are melting down all your jewelry, the government collectors are going around saying, "Look, we are all going to be killed if we don't give this guy money." Usually they did not impose light taxes, they were heavy, heavy, tribute, tax, and toll, and people were being impoverished. Judah and Israel and all the nations around there hated it.

B. Anti-Assyrian alliance

Rezin, the king of Syria and Pekah, the king of Israel decided to form an alliance. They went around to every king of all the nations, Moab, Edom, Philistine and so on, and they said, "We're putting together an alliance. We are all going to join our armies." You know how the Assyrians do it; they attack one country at a time, conquer it and attack another one and that is how they win and it is easy for them to do that. That is a strategy that many nations have used. Hitler did it in Europe in World War II, first Austria, then Czechoslovakia, then Poland, then Belgium, then France, and so on. You knock off all possible opposition and then you go after the bigger ones like Russia and so on.

C. Ahaz refuses to join alliance

They proposed to Ahaz, the king of Judah, to join them because they said that we can put together a pretty big fighting force if we are all united together, and it will be a lot of work for the Assyrians to marshal the troops to beat us. But Ahaz said, "No, I won't join." Why wouldn't he join? Because Isaiah the prophet was preaching, "Don't join. You trust in Me says the Lord, don't you ever trust in military alliances. They'll look good, they'll look like the thing to do, I know you are suffering but you must trust Me." Although he did not always listen to Isaiah, he did that time and he said, "Nuts, I won't join." That is a loose translation.

D. Syria and Israel attack Judah

Now, you are Israel and Syria, what are you going to do? You cannot easily go to war with this guy who will not join you right in the heart of the whole alliance because Judah is in the middle of it all, if you think of where the nations are located, right in the middle. So they say, "Let us attack Judah, that's what we will do first. Our combined armies will attack Judah, we will defeat them, we will depose King Ahaz and we'll place on the throne a king of our choosing." It is all there in 2 Kings 16. They did that.

E. Judah appeals to Assyria

Now, you are King Ahaz, these guys are attacking you and you are scared because they come with big armies against you. They are attacking you because you will not fight against the king of Assyria. Who do you appeal to for help? The king of Assyria. So he sent, "Hey, help! They are attacking me because I won't join them in attacking you." The Assyrians did come; they rushed troops right in. The coalition had never been fully formed. Originally it was to have all the Edomites and everybody; that all fell apart when these guys decided to knock off the Judeans and so on, so everybody else was out of it.

F. Israel attacked by Assyria and Judah

The Assyrians came and attacked Syria and Israel, and they annexed all of Syria and virtually all of Israel. They left a little bit of the tribal territory of Ephraim and then Judah counterattacked. Again, not commendable. This is

condemned, for example, in Hosea 5:5-8. Hosea condemns that counterattack. Ahaz is not clean in everything here. They did go right up and captured all of Benjamin and even a little chunk of southern Ephraim as far as the city of Bethel. This produced a bigger Judah. They took the southern part and then the northern part was reduced by capture.

G. Israel reduced to rump state

Israel ended up being what is sometimes called in history a “remainder state” or a “rump state”. The amount of territory may be eight or nine percent of what they previously had held. This is only from 732 on, just ten years later the Assyrians came and finished off even that; they just took all of it reducing Judah’s population and control down to Judah itself and they took the rest. This is very sad. No matter how unjustified they were in wanting to attack Judah, it is still a very sad, sad thing because it is the loss of ten northern tribes to the Assyrians. They are no longer an independent people, these are God’s people, they are His chosen people and He has really abandoned them. He has done what the covenant says, “I will turn My face from you,” and He has done it. “I will give you to your enemies, and you will go after them in one direction and flee from them in seven,” and they did. All of those covenant curses have come about.

IV. Isaiah 9

It is in this context that a famous prophecy from Isaiah is delivered. Here are some key portions from Isaiah 9. He says in Isaiah 9:1, this is Isaiah preaching right after that Syro-Ephraimite in which the north has been virtually destroyed and only a little bit of it is left and he says this, “Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,” he has done this because that is part of the north, “but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles...” and so on. Without going into all the details, the question was rightly asked, how come Naphtali and Zebulun are singled out? He could have said, “Well, it is a sad situation now for Asher and Dan now that they are in captivity.” He could have named a lot of tribes. For some reason he picks Zebulun and Naphtali. Very interesting until you begin to check and see where exactly Zebulun and Naphtali are. The people walking in darkness did see a great light, wonderful things happen, and there is joy, all accomplished by a child that is born. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this.

It starts with the relationship to Zebulun and Naphtali. Here is what you will find if you check out a map in the back of a Bible, if it happens to have the tribal districts. You will see that Nazareth, where Jesus was born, was smack dab in the middle of the tribal territory of Zebulun. And you will see that the western edge of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus did most of His preaching is in the tribal district of Naphtali. Jesus goes a lot of places, we all know that. He preaches all over the towns and villages of Samaria and Judea and so on. We do not just mean that He confined Himself to those places but most of the detailed stories about Him suggest that most of his time was spent right in Zebulun and Naphtali. Here is this messianic prophecy choosing those two relatively obscure tribal territories and saying, “That’s where the action will be,” seven hundred and some years before it actually occurs. But, sure enough, that is where the one who is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace shows up. That is the answer succinctly as I can give it. That is why it is so important.

V. Emphases in Chronicles

Let me jump to Chronicles for a minute. As you know, there are a lot of parallels between Chronicles, Samuel, and Kings. You can read many of the same stories almost identically. However, there are also some very special emphases of the chronicler. Even though Chronicles is written around 520 or 530 BC, Chronicles is a book that is looking at the past with much of the same coverage as you have in Samuel and Kings but with some special emphases.

A. The Temple

One is the temple. When you read Chronicles, anything that the chronicler can say about the temple, he will. It is very interesting. A lot of history in the temple. A lot more chapters about Solomon's role in building the temple. A lot more emphasis on the temple and its furnishings. Why? Because the chronicler is writing at a time when the returned Jews after the exile are desperately trying to get the temple rebuilt. The work of the chronicler is partly to encourage them to do that very thing. So the chronicler is a pro-temple writer looking back and saying, "Just remember, the temple was a very, very important thing," and it is. This is not some inappropriate bias; this is a very important emphasis. There is nothing more important than worship. The first, most basic responsibility of any believer is to worship.

B. The South

Then his emphasis is southern. Why? Because when he is writing, sometime around 530 or 520 BC, Judah is the only Israel there is, and it is a southern area. The north is completely different and just as province in the Persian Empire.

C. The Monarchy

He has a tremendous interest in the monarchy; he is especially interested in David but also Solomon. The chronicler wants you to know that anything that David did was good. Anything Solomon did that was good, he wants you to know it. He does even soft-pedal a little bit of what they did that was bad; he kind of minimizes it. Is this because he is changing history? No, it is because he is being selective for a purpose. They all knew, these post-exilic Jews, that God knows how to punish sin. That was real clear to them because they have just come out of a horrid seventy-year-period of terrible trial and exile. They did not have any mystery in their minds about that. What they needed was encouragement to say what was good from the past and how that can inform us, how can it serve as a model for us, how can it guide as we try to rebuild the ruins of Jerusalem, the ruins of the temple, etc. here in this time.

D. Theocracy

He also emphasizes theocracy a lot. What is theocracy? It is the rule of God. So, the chronicler pays a lot of attention to God's superintending power. The people he writes to need to hear that; I would say we also need to hear it. A lot of these themes in Chronicles are also fabulous for a modern-day audience. They are not just appropriate to 520 BC; there are many parallels between them and us.

E. The Priesthood

He also emphasizes the priesthood. Because the chronicler is trying to get people once again to worship and honor God properly. The priesthood are the helpers. This is the clergy. If they do it right they will really help people fulfill God's covenant worship responsibilities.

F. Proper worship

Proper worship in all of its details. If Kings does not mention how it all worked, the chronicler will say, "And there were this many Levites helping and this many doorkeepers and this many things and the offerings were brought in in this manner." From his sources, all the detail he can get to encourage people in the right way it is to be done.

G. Lineages

Lineages are important to the chronicler. Therefore you have *The Chronicles*. Lots and lots and lots of genealogy because these are people who need to be able to realize that they are back in touch with the great

tradition. They are God's people, it is continuing, He has not destroyed His people utterly; he has decimated them, but there is a remnant and they are the remnant. They ought to feel connected and attached, and they should feel that they are at a key juncture in the whole progress of His dealing with His people.

H. Reconstitute around the temple

If you are going to do that, you have got to reconstitute them around the temple. You do not just have people, but you have worshipping people.

I. Judean restoration

The Judean restoration flows from all of that. If the nation can be rebuilt, if people can get reorganized, armed again, and have a healthy economic and political style, this will only encourage their sense of faithfulness to God and loyalty to Him. It will show that He is rebuilding His people.

J. Faith and hope of God's reward

Finally, ultimately, Chronicles really is good at encouraging faith and hope that God will reward those who do His will. It is big them in Chronicles. Of course, who would not want Christians to know that? If you are leading a youth group, you want that youth group to have faith and hope that God will reward those who do His will. If you are preaching to a congregation, teaching a class, leading a Bible study, it is the kind of thing you want people to know. Chronicles is good for that. It is a very positive book in its special emphases. We do not spend a lot of time in this class on Chronicles. It is not because we do not like Chronicles; it is a question of efficiency. We are covering a lot of material fast, as you know, and therefore we slight Chronicles in one sense, because it does cover the same territory that Samuel and Kings does, but this was an attempt to try to lay before you some of the special emphases that are very valuable. You do not need to slight Chronicles. Do not say, "We did not do much with it in Bible Survey so it must not be that important." No, I think you will find a series just on Chronicles will be rich for people if you do preaching series. You can preach for half a year from a book like this and have people feel it was very helpful and useful. A lot of great themes.

Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum

I. Late Eighth Century Prophets

We now focus even more closely on the prophets that we began to talk about with this reference to Isaiah. We are looking tonight at some late eighth century prophets: Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum. There is some possibility that Nahum would not have easily belong in this group. Often times you will have reference made to the eighth century prophets as mainly four: Isaiah and Micah preaching in the south and Hosea and Amos preaching in the north. Jonah is also an eighth century prophet, although not everybody would agree with that assessment, but the evidence for it is good. Likewise, Nahum appears to be preaching right close to this time period as well and is worthy of inclusion.

A. Who is the issue?

1. Assyria is the big issue because God is employing the Assyrians to fulfill the covenant curse that predicts He would give His people to their enemies if they were not faithful.
2. Also, of course, the sinful north and south are described regularly, indicted, and condemned.
3. Many corrupt institutions are involved including the kingship. It is pretty rare in Old Testament history that the nation could go bad if the kings were trying to keep it good. Usually the king has much control over the general direction of things and is also, by definition, the leader of the religion. The king is the commander and chief of the clergy; that is the way it works in the Old Testament. It is pretty hard to miss that the nation will go as the kingship goes.

B. What are we dealing with?

1. We are dealing with the office of prophet. These prophets were treated much the same way that we treat diplomats today. You cannot arrest them, you cannot imprison them, you cannot kill them; they have a diplomatic immunity. A prophet was regarded as a representative from heaven and should be given free speech and allowed to say what he wanted to say; he was supposed to be protected. It was not always so. When you see Elijah running from Jezebel, the queen of the north, that is because Jezebel is not an Israelite woman. She was a Phoenician woman. She was from Tyre, a Phoenician city, and did not hold that the prophets had a prophetic immunity and was willing to kill prophets accordingly.
2. The prophet is also a divine council reporter. 1 Kings 22 is a perfect example of that. The prophet regards himself as someone God allowed to be in on the divine council, God's heavenly planning sessions, as it were. The place where God speaks with angels and instructs them to do his will. This is presented in a somewhat stylized way and perhaps very simplified for our purposes compared to the complexity and glory that may be involved in the actual heavenly scene.
3. What the prophet often does is indicate, "I've seen the future plan for I've been there. I've heard God give these instructions and I'm the one He has sent in this case." The prophet also views himself as a messenger. We talked about that last time. He is saying what God has said.
4. We have not talked about much about the prophet as intercessor but you can see this in Moses, the paradigm prophet, the original model for them all. You can also see it in a prophet like Amos who prays for Israel. You can see it in Isaiah who is trying to help the people to understand what God wants them to know so that God's wrath will not come upon them.

5. The prophets are preachers to the world. God is not just instructing His people, He is speaking about everybody and speaking to everybody who counts. Most of the time these prophecies delivered to foreign nations were heard only by people in Judah or Israel. It is not because God did not have a point to make about other nations. It is just that that was where people were willing to listen at that time to what He had to say.

Then it is important to appreciate that there were plenty of prophets. David had prophets like Gad and Nathan and so on, various prophets you read about at various times in historical books.

6. But now this era of classical prophecy from 760 to 460 BC includes writing. There is a deep desire to preserve what they said. The writing prophets are those who God is inspiring, not just for their own generation but obviously for all time. God is building a Scripture and through them he is helping people to understand how to live and how to think in times of great change, times of great threat, times of great danger, times of uncertainty, times of transition and so on. A lot of the prophetic materials are helpful to people in that very way.

C. Where is it all located?

It is located both in Judah and northern Israel. But, as time goes on, increasingly it is more only in Judah because there is not much to northern Israel after 722 BC. It is a memory, but it is not in actuality a nation anymore.

D. When?

These prophets that we are looking at tonight are preaching around the time of the fall of Samaria. That is the big event for Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum. It is not the only event but it is the biggest single thing.

E. Why are they preaching?

1. They are called to preach because there has been this long history of breaking God's covenant; a long, long history.

2. Yahweh has been treated increasingly as just a national God. No longer an omnipotent God, just that national God. They have pigeonholed him now. They have got their personal gods and their clan gods; He is still their national God, but He is only that.

3. The prophets are preaching about God's justice and judgment; a great deal about His righteousness and what righteousness is and how that is inviolable. You cannot disobey and insult God forever without His eventually doing something about it.

4. They are obviously teaching against idolatry. Almost all the prophets attack idolatry in some way or another because it was a constant temptation for the Israelites. They are concerned as well about social injustice. Why? Because what God wants is not merely that each individual to be a nice person; rather, He wants the society as a whole, all of His people, to reflect His values. If you have somebody for his own personal prophet or power misusing or abusing somebody else, that wrecks it for God, as it were. It ruins what He had in mind. It sabotages, it pollutes His purposes in having a people. We are to accomplish His will. We are to do His will on earth as it is in heaven. Social injustice is a terrible thing.

As you may know, in the history of Christianity, often there has been an emphasis on one extreme or the other without proper balance. Some people have pushed social justice as the problem for a people and not said anything about personal morality. "Do whatever you want personally as long as the society provides proper economic and legal fairness and opportunity." That is one extreme. The other extreme says, "Who cares what the society is like, just be individually clean and pure and live an upright life." Both are improper extremes. There should be a balance between caring about social justice so that the whole corporate entity reflects God's glory and caring about yourself so that you as an individual are upright and moral, as you have in Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum.

Even in sins that might involve no one else, just personally, you want your thoughts and actions to be pure and noble. The balance is found there. There is a special emphasis on social justice in these prophets but plenty on personal morality as well.

One thing that was happening is this—class divisions were developing. As you can see in some of the commentaries, an economic shift was behind this. There was increasing urbanization in ancient Israel. Cities like Jerusalem and Samaria began to grow very large. There was greater wealth and greater economic opportunity there. Many people were getting off the farms and coming into the city. The minute that happens they no longer have a means to care for themselves and they are almost totally dependent on somebody else. If the people they are dependent upon are manipulative enough, they can begin to exploit them and make them work hard for not much money. So when you take people away from their access to productivity, the land, you put them at a certain kind of risk. If good people are everywhere, the risk is eliminated, but if people are evil then the risk of exploitation is enormous. One sees Isaiah, Micah, Amos, Hosea, and Nahum preaching against that kind of exploitation, the class divisions, and the rich people that grew up. One example of this is from Isaiah 5.

It was not proper for anybody to ever gain more land than his proper share. When you had a chance to buy land as in the Book of Ruth chapter 4, you bought it only from a relative; it could only be within a family and next of kin had the only right. Well, of course, that is the law. If the law is broken and ignored, anybody can buy any land and the wealthier you get the more you can wait for a bad year, bad harvest. You can go to people and say, “I’ll lend you a hundred thousand, just relax.” This person says, “I don’t need a hundred thousand.” “Oh no, let me give it to you.” You give him a hundred thousand and then you know darn well there will be another bad year soon enough, maybe three, four, five years down the line and they will not be able to make the payments. Then you go to court and you say, “So and so can’t make the payments; I want the land.” That is the way it is done. That is the practice that is described. It is said this way in Isaiah 5:8, “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.” All the poor people are squeezed out by this practice of lending and foreclosing, lending, foreclosing, and violating the law. You cannot do it under the Pentateuchal law. You cannot do lending and foreclosing, but it was being done in Isaiah’s day. The Lord Almighty says, “Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain.” That is less than you started with. “Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no regard for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst.” It is talking about the class divisions, the rich exploiting the poor. It is a way of saying it in the poetry of that day. People then understood it; with a little bit of explanation we can understand it as well. It is an example of the kind of thing they preached and taught against. Class divisions as almost a subcategory of what produces social injustice.

5. There is also punishment. The punishment is not only of individuals or of nations, it is of both. In the New Covenant there is increasingly an emphasis upon the fact that everybody answers for his own sin at the final judgment. But in the Old Covenant, there was a special corporate emphasis that said, “Part of the way God works is to treat people as blocks.” If He has a people and they are mistreated by another people, that mistreating people has to be punished. It just has to happen; God is not going to allow them to get away with that. So there is punishment for the individual evildoer and also punishment for the evildoing nation. That is how the Israelites got their start as a punishing army to punish the Amorites, Genesis 15. Now it is becoming clear they are getting as bad as the Amorites. How long will it be before they get the same fate being dispossessed from their land by somebody else? That is what they have to look forward to.

II. Isaiah

Here are just some of the preachable themes specific to Isaiah. I am not running you through Isaiah teaching you everything in particular; I am just saying that as you study Isaiah through the years, here are just some of the topics, the wonderful topics, in this book.

A. Sample Themes in Isaiah

1. *Creation ongoing*

The idea of creation ongoing. Do not forget that for the Bible creation is a constant process from Genesis to Revelation. This is a big theme in Isaiah: new creation, ongoing creation, and God redeeming a people and making a new people for Himself.

2. *Apocalyptic concept begins*

Also in Isaiah begins the concept of *apocalyptic*. What is that? *Apocalyptic* means that which refers to revealed or uncovered material. Isaiah contains some material; sometimes it is called the Isaianic Apocalypse. Chapters 24 to 27 is the Isaianic Apocalypse where you have some of the kind of language that you get in the Book of Revelation. Some of the same kind you get in Daniel also, and in Ezekiel and Zachariah, other Old Testament apocalyptic books. The idea here is that, and we will talk about this much more later, it is looking through the sweep of history to grand, cataclysmic events where God intervenes in human events. There will be much more about apocalyptic after next week. We will begin to talk about some of the themes of apocalyptic and we will especially find that in Daniel, Zachariah and Ezekiel. Isaiah is the starter; he is the first prophet to be an apocalyptic prophet, a special category that we will explain.

3. *Reuses Canaanite mythic themes*

Isaiah even goes so far as to take some Canaanite mythic themes and reuse them cleansing them. This is a very interesting phenomenon. Back in chapter 5 there is a place where he talks about *Mote*, which is usually translated *death*, opening its jaws and clamping over the evil ones. That really is almost the exact wording that you find in some Ugaritic myths. *Mote* is a god of death. *Death* because that is what *Mote* means in Canaanite. He opens his mouth and swallows people. What Isaiah does is to appeal to people who are acculturated with this myth and these pagan stories, and God inspires him to use that as a point of contact but not to exceed to it. Isaiah never shows that he believes it, it is just that he takes some of the language and uses it to talk about what the Israelites have to fear from Yahweh. It is called *reuse* or *cleansed reuse* of Canaanite mythic themes; Isaiah has some of that. So much in Isaiah is messianic and particularly brilliant, I think, and this seems to me that it is never tiring to see the intricacy of it.

4. *Messiah and nation / Christ and church*

It is the way Isaiah links Christ and the nation of Israel. In the servant songs there are places where God says, "My servant Israel," and you know that when He is talking about His servant it is Israel. Then there are other places where he talks about, "My servant," and does not add the word Israel but seems to be talking about an individual; "He did this and he did that, and he suffered in this way, and that happened, with his stripes we are healed, and he was bruised for our iniquities and so on," and you say, "Which is it?" That is exactly the question in the Book of Acts that the Ethiopian eunuch is asking when Phillip connects with him at Gaza. He says, "Who is he talking about? Is it himself or it is somebody else? Who is it, I don't get it." Some of these passages seem to be about a nation, some seem to be about an individual and that is the genius of it. Christ is the head of His people. His people are the embodiment of Him. So in the New Testament we talk about the body and Paul uses that

analogy a lot. Paul did not make it up out of the blue saying, “I’ve got a great idea, I’m going to make Christ the head and we’ll be His body.” He got it from Isaiah. It is a beautiful thing to see that inner working.

5. The council of Yahweh

The concept of the council of Yahweh is the idea that the prophet is allowed to imagine or inspired to imagine that he is really up there in heaven listening to God make plans for the future. There is a lot of that in Isaiah, “council of Yahweh, council of God” language.

6. Advisor to the king

The prophet as an advisor to the king. That is not always evident in other cases. Other prophets may have done it. We know from the Book of Jeremiah that there were times when the king sought out Jeremiah, usually privately because he was embarrassed to be seen with this critic of his, but he would still do it. We will later see how King Josiah seeks out a prophet like Huldah for advice about the future. Hezekiah and Isaiah have a close relationship. They are talking all the time. Regularly Isaiah comes and advises the king with “thus says the Lord.” God is giving guidance to a good king through a good prophet. It is nice to see that pattern; it is an interesting picture.

7. Blessing / curse / restoration blessing

We have talked before about the blessing/curse/blessing pattern, but Isaiah shows it everywhere. You can really see that. The blessing up until the exile, then exile, the curse, and then the restoration blessings better than ever, far beyond anything yet experienced or even imagined.

8. All nations in plan of God

All nations with a place in the plan of God. You might say, “Oh, come on, really?” Yes, there are a number of themes like that in Isaiah and it is really quite nice to see it. I do not think I have an example to give you. But there are several places where that is a theme.

9. God is running the show

The fact that God is running the show, Israel is not going to fall until God does that and will not return until God causes that.

10. Redemption dependent on divine opportunity

Redemption is dependent upon divine opportunity. This is quite a theme to preach. How are the people defeated, beaten by the Babylonians, sent into exile, how are they going to rescue themselves? What are they going to do, military techniques? No. Political techniques? No way, they have no political clout. Economics? They are in slavery, in exile virtually. What is going to happen? The answer: God is going to provide the opportunity. In the case of Isaiah He provides it specifically through a named individual. What Isaiah does is actually to predict specifically that Cyrus, by name, will come and do some wonderful things. When Isaiah said it, probably everybody who heard it said, “Who, what did he say, who was that?” But he actually predicted long before the event a Persian king who would destroy the empire that was the empire in Isaiah’s day. In Isaiah’s day it was Assyria. They did not know anything about the next empire, the Babylonians, and the empire after that, the Persians. They knew that there were Persians and they knew there were Babylonians, but they could not predict history, but Isaiah does. He basically says, “Well, here is how it’s going to go,” as God inspires him to be able to say it. The *Servant of the Lord* idea which I have talked about and Christ embodying that Zionism, the hope of heaven. Isaiah is a big booster of the concept of *Jerusalem as heaven*. Remember that we have this theme developing all the time. “When you get into the promise land,” God says in Deuteronomy 12, “I’ll have a place where I’ll cause

my name to dwell. I'll have a place where I make contact with you, where you will be close to me and I will be close to you." The temple symbolized that, but the temple was located somewhere and that was Jerusalem. In Isaiah you have lots of themes about Zion, Jerusalem, and the importance of getting there. Everybody will come to Jerusalem in the final days. Everybody will be there. He is transforming the idea of Jerusalem from that of just a particular city in Palestine to this concept of where God is and where all the people who are righteous want to be. When you then see at the end of the Book of Revelation all of this wonderful stuff about the city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, where all the people will live who are redeemed, it is following right off of what Isaiah predicts. Then forgiveness of sins. We all ought to preach the forgiveness of sins. Do not forget that. People need to hear that or there is no hope. Nobody can do it other than by confessing sins and accepting forgiveness. It is a great theme to preach and emphasize for people.

B. Overview of Isaiah

I am quickly trying to give a feel for this big, complex book. Aside from Jeremiah, which is a little bit longer in the actual word count than Isaiah but so much simpler in structure, Isaiah is the most compound, complex of all the prophetic books. It is the biggest thing, although there is a lot in Ezekiel, too. Ezekiel is a very long book as well, but it is so simply organized that neither Jeremiah or Ezekiel are rivals to Isaiah in their complexity. I am going to take a little bit of time to try to unravel that.

1. Introduction

It starts off with an introduction against external worship.

2. Early prophecies

Then you have some early prophecies. This is part of what I read in chapter 5 for example.

3. Inaugural vision

Then his inaugural vision. This is where he is called. He sees God high and lifted up, his train fills the temple, there is the seraphs yelling holy, holy, holy, and he says, "I'm a people of unclean lips, I'm among them; I myself am one. What am I going to do?" God gives them the reassurance of the symbolism of getting his lips cleansed with a coal from the altar and so he can serve God.

4. Present world vs. coming kingdom of God

Chapters 7 to 12 emphasize what is going on in the world versus the coming kingdom of God. Look at chapter 10 for example, the Doom for Assyria. That was a big thing to say to people. Assyria was all powerful, you saw the size of their empire and yet he is saying, "Yes, they've destroyed the north. Yes, they've sopped up everything except a little bit of Samaria and that's going soon." Some of his prophecies reflect the time after 722 BC when all of the north was gone, just little Judah was left. Yet, he can say, "No, it is the Assyrians, ultimately, that are going right down the drain."

5. Oracles against foreign nations

Chapters 13 to 23, eleven chapters of oracles against foreign nations. It is important to appreciate that he actually includes Samaria and Jerusalem in some of those. So just like Amos, he can define even the "chosen people" as God's enemies. Remember oracles against foreign nations are not because God likes to say, "I hate you, I hate you, you're going to hell," it is not that at all. It is that God is a just God. If His promise to His people that they will get out of the oppression they are in is to be true, then there has to be suppression of the oppressor. That is what those always are. They are always saying, "You think you are so big now and you're dominating everybody and you're bleeding them dry and you've done this and that and you cruelly conquered them but the

time will come when it will be the other way around.” That is what oracles against foreign nations are. They are, “You will get your just desserts. You will get your comeuppance,” as we also say in English. “You will not have this unfair advantage forever that you now enjoy over my people.”

6. Isaianic Apocalypse

Then the Apocalypse. We will talk more about that next time.

7. Woes

Then some woes against Israel and Judah for unfaithfulness.

8. Judgment on Edom, joy for the redeemed

Then a turning point. It flips, then, because you get both judgment on Edom, and by the way, interestingly, Edom is the most attacked foreign nation in all of the prophetic books. It is very interesting. That is partly because the Edomites just constantly gave the Israelites grief. We will see more about that when we come to Obadiah. Then joy for the redeemed. There is kind of a divider here in the historical chapters. But a little glimmer of joy is starting there at the end of chapter 35.

9. Historical chapters

Then you have some historical chapters that are the same as in 2 Kings where the role of Isaiah in connection with Hezekiah in connection with the great and threatening invasion of Sennacherib. By the way, this has interesting historical correlation. If you read what is going on in those chapters, you see that this great Assyrian king’s huge empire comes to Jerusalem and besieges it, surrounds it, wants to destroy it and he cannot. For a long time skeptical scholars said, “Oh yeah sure, this is the kind of stuff that they write it centuries later and make up this story about little dinky Jerusalem could resist the entire Assyrian army. Oh yeah sure.” that is the kind of historicizing you get until the annals of Sennacherib were found. Interestingly there is an annal for 701 BC when he does, in fact, surround Jerusalem and he mentions Hezekiah. He says, “This King in Jerusalem, I bottled him up like a bird in a cage.” You might say, “What does that mean?” He says in every other thing in that same annal, “I destroyed and took captive King so and so, I put his city to the torch and so on, I broke down the walls of this and I destroyed... and I destroyed... and took captive... and took captive...” as for Hezekiah of Judah, “I bottled him up like a bird in a cage.” In other words, it is a boastful attempt to make the best of a failed attempt to break Jerusalem and the king.

10. Looking forward to Exile and need to return

There really is a dramatic shift then with chapter 40 because this material has been organized in the typical bifid fashion that so many of the prophetic books are organized in. It is the *woe* first and the *weal* second. You have the weal all put together in the second part. There are two big chunks here, 40 to 55 is looking forward to the exile and the need to return from it. So there is new Exodus language in chapter 40. In here God comes up leading His people up out of the south, nations trembling, and Zion rejoicing, and then the servant songs. By the way, that is a Moses figure. My servant suffers for and with the people just as Moses did. So Jesus is a new Moses as well as many other things.

11. Zion's glory and shame

But then another chunk of material. Some people have said, “Wow, this seems like a whole new topic,” therefore, probably from a later epoch. That really is a mistaken way to do it. That is not some new time period that it reflects; it is just a grouping of material. It is topically organized, and this is all on this tremendous emphasis on Zion.

1. Included in that, how God's salvation is generally available.
2. How important it is that the leaders be corrected.
3. Righteous people have a good future.
4. True religion is the desire.
5. Repentance is needed.
6. God must deliver Zion, it has to be a place that is free and good to live in forever.
7. The need for cleansing from sin and faithfulness to God.

Those are great themes. You could do a long sermon series just from the last eleven chapters; they have great stuff in there. Wonderful pre-Christian prepare-for-Christian-truth kind of preaching from Isaiah. The bifid break is after 39. Another way to say it is, 1 to 35 is a block and 36 to 39 is the hinge or the divider block; we have a similar divider block in Jeremiah.

III. Micah

A quick look at Micah. Micah is kind of easy to understand in one sense because of the patterning. It is organized by three groups of woe and weal. Micah is not bifid, it is trifid; it is put together with three blocks of material. These are the woe/weal progressions that you so often see in the prophets.

A. First woe / weal

Chapters 1 and 2 start out with a woe oracle. Woe means somebody has died. So when you say, "Woe to you," it is a way of saying, "Hey, you're going to die." Woe for you or woe to you means, "I'm singing your death song." When Jesus says, "Woe to you Pharisees," that they did not like to hear. That was not some little thing like, "I would like to suggest a problem."

1. Punishment of Samaria and Judah

Then, woe to the oppressive nation. Who is the oppressive nation? The answer is Samaria and Judah.

2. Reunification under Yahweh

Then, weal, reunification and increase under Yahweh. God has a remedy, an antidote, a solution, and a bright future. It is possible Micah did not preach these in this order. Somebody was lead by God to organize them this way. We just do not know, it could be chronological, but do not assume that. It is obviously thematic, but is it also chronological? Most of the people have said, "if it is so obviously thematic topical in its organization, it is less likely chronological," but it is a guess.

B. Second woe / weal

Then you have in chapter 3:

1. Woe on corrupt leaders and corrupt Jerusalem
2. Complex set of weal oracles
3. Zion

4. The Messiah and Purification. There is a lot on purification in the Prophets as they are deeply concerned with the question, How can you get right with God, how can you possibly get right with God? Look at the long history of our degeneration as a people, our idolatry, our sin, our flaws, our faults. We are going into exile, we

have broken the covenant in every way you could think of breaking it. Is there really any hope? So they are longing for purification. It is wonderful when God says, “Yep, I’ve got a way of doing this, it is coming, there is a method for making it happen and you will be a pure people someday. My people will be pure.

C. The final cycle

1. Covenant lawsuit

There is a covenant lawsuit there. I think I have alluded to that before. The covenant lawsuit is something one also finds a lot in Isaiah. It is a case where the prophet is inspired to imagine Judah or Israel on trial. They have offended God; they have broken His covenant so they are on trial. Who is the plaintiff? The answer is the Lord God. Who is the prosecuting attorney? The answer is the Lord God. Who is the judge? The answer is the Lord God. Who is the warden of the prison to keep them in exile? The Lord God. So, they are not going to win this court case; there is not a chance. That is the way it works. It is really an effective kind of way of saying, “Your doom is coming, you’re in trouble.”

2. Weal of lament

Then it ends with chapter 7, a weal of lament, a kind of a lament ending with a deliverance plea and trust, assurance, and praise. Just like you learn in the *ACTDAP* formula of the Psalms. If you read chapter 7, you say, “I recognize that, I know that, I can see those ingredients of the *ACTDAP* format because it ends with a lament. What is the purpose of lament? It is not just to say, “I’m miserable, thank you very much.” The purpose of a lament is to say, “God, we need Your help. We are asking for deliverance.” That is the way the book ends. Micah knows that God inspires him to know and to make clear to the people that they need God’s deliverance. They need help; they need mercy from God; only God can do it. They cannot save themselves. They are in trouble. Only God can do it.

IV. Nahum

We wind up with Nahum and have a quick look at this guy in terms of simple structure. First an acrostic poem. *Acrostic* means going through the alphabet. So this starts with the equivalent of the letter *A* in Hebrew and then goes to the equivalent of the letter *B* and so on right through the Hebrew alphabet. It is about God’s majesty but also His judgment. It is very powerful, very glorious, but He is going to bring judgment for Israel. I said, “For Israel He is going to bring judgment.” I can understand that that would be just the thing that somebody would write in the wrong way. It is for Israel but against Assyria. It is very important that you understand the Book of Nahum is like one great big foreign nation oracle that comprises a whole book in itself. Remember how we saw a number of chapters in Isaiah, oracles against foreign nations. Now the Book of Nahum is like two or three chapters out of the chunk of material in Isaiah. Some of the prophets have a very limited focus, a special purpose, and that is what Nahum is.

A. This is a foreign nation oracle

Nahum is just a foreign nation oracle against Nineveh. Nineveh was the major city and functional capital of Assyria. The siege and sack of Nineveh are coming. What a thing to say. This huge, powerful, unstoppable, unbeatable, massive empire; who is going to knock them off? Who is on the horizon that could do it? It is a lot like saying, “Woe to you United States because Guatemala will someday come and take over.”

B. Nahum is a southern prophet

C. Timing

Then, finally, a description of Nineveh and a comparison with Egypt in 3:8. That helps nail down to some degree when this book might have been written. I have lumped it in with the late eighth century prophets for convenience but, in fact, that reference in chapter 3 to Egypt and its destruction must be a reference to the fall of Thebes. It mentions Thebes specifically. That is the country the Assyrians themselves knocked off in 663 BC. Then in 612 Nineveh fell to the Babylonians. That is the time frame we are in. We are really into the seventh century with this book, but I have included it along with the other two.

D. What are some of the emphases?

Many times Old Testament theologians talk about reversal language. There is a lot of reversal language. Jesus uses it when he says, "The first will be last and the last will be first," He is using reversal language. In other words, God can just flip what we think is going to transpire, what we think is so certain and definite. He can simply turn it around. So many times the prophets will say, "Yes, here is the way it is now but God is going to turn that thing totally around so that those who are now in power will be out of power; those who are now nothing will be great and special in His plan." That is what you have, the defeat of those who thought themselves impossible to defeat and the eventual righting of wrongs.

E. Overview

There is again the little overview that we looked at, although it is described this way: God's righteous anger requires Him to relieve His people of their oppressor so it is for Israel against Nineveh. Remember now, Nineveh is the capital so it is really talking about the whole Assyrian Empire, not just the city. Remember that. It is just like we might say, "Well, Washington and Moscow are disagreeing; it means really the U.S. and Russia. God will cause Nineveh to be destroyed by their enemies and then finally Nineveh's extensive wickedness gets itself into a place where there is no chance to escape.

F. General advice

Will you join me in prayer as we close?

Father, thank you for the way Your word is rich, is varied, and has a lot in it. That means that there is a lifetime of study that will always yield blessings and encouragements and information that will challenge and sometimes even amaze us. We pray that we can sort it all straight, understand it, and appreciate how we may use it for the benefit of our own faithfulness to you and to encourage the faithfulness of others. In Christ name, Amen.

2 Kings 22-25

Will you join me in prayer please? Father, we would appreciate Your presence; we know that You are kind enough to guarantee it if we ask, and we appreciate that. We thank You that You can make Your word which You inspired so long ago fresh, clear in our minds, and that You can make practical for guiding us and for guiding others. That is our desire and we pray for that through Christ. Amen.

I. The Babylonian Empire

2 Kings 22-25 is set in the huge Babylonian empire, near the vast Median Empire. From the point of view of the Israelites, that is very far away. It would hardly have occurred to any Israelite that eventually that empire would change hands. The Persians would dominate it and it would become the Medial/Persian Empire, really what most of us just call the Persian Empire because the Persians dominate it.

The time period we are looking at is the time period of the Babylonian Empire which is vast. This is a huge amount of territory way up into what we call modern day Turkey, way down into modern day Ethiopia, and covering virtually all of Egypt and some of modern day Libya. It was a very big empire, and it certainly covered all of what we find in the material that we deal with today in 2 Kings 22-25.

II. 2 Kings 22-25

The story begins with a wonderful revival. It is the last great, good story; 2 Kings 22 and 23. In some ways it is what 2 Kings is heading for if viewed positively. 1 and 2 Kings is a tragic story; it has an unhappy ending, but there are ways in which the lessons out of that tragedy are still very positive for us. One of the lessons is that those people who fully give themselves to God and keep His covenant have the assurance of His blessing, care, protection, acceptance and so on. These are wonderful truths. Josiah is a young king, only eight-years-old, when he comes to reign; so he is a boy king.

A. Foundation Deposits

It is the eighteenth year of his reign, and that year happens to be 622 BC, and a discovery is made during temple renovations. The temple in Jerusalem was built like most ancient buildings in the ancient world; it was built with, what are called *foundation deposits*. These foundation deposits were the kinds of things that we might put in a *time capsule*, that is an expression used by Americans. It is something that you put valuables into when you build a building in order to open later. It would have all kinds of documents that tell you about the building and its purposes, the people who once occupied the building and so on. They did this kind of thing routinely in the ancient world and would place documents related to the purpose of the building in a building. Solomon had apparently done that.

Solomon built the temple around 970 BC or so, 980 or 970, and therefore you have a period of three and a half centuries before 622 BC, when renovations discover a copy of *The Law*, either the Book of Deuteronomy or the whole Pentateuch, hard to tell which for sure. What happens then is this is brought to the king with great excitement. Since it is three and a half centuries old, it is very interesting. It is not as if no one had ever seen a Bible before, but they did have great interest in saying, "What does this old, old, old, old copy of the law contain?" None of them had a copy that old. They were all excited and interested. "What will we find in this? Will it be the same as what we are reading?"

Of course, it was, in fact, the same as what they had already had the chance to read. However, the king, like most people, probably never had a chance to listen to the Word of God straight through over a long period of time. Lots of people have heard a sermon here and a sermon there. If you get them reading the Bible in large chunks, it makes a profound difference. We are doing this in our church, reading the Bible through in a year, and all kinds of people who have been Christians for decades are saying, "This is eye opening, I love this, it is amazing the stuff I'm finding." They are just so tickled about it because the Bible is not written primarily to be digested six or eight verses at a time every Sunday morning. That is just one way to support knowledge of the Bible. The Bible is written as a wonderful, big book of great material so that it may be beneficially read in large chunks. He says, "Read it through for me," and they read it through.

Here is a young, 26-year-old king who is hearing minute after minute, really hour after hour the Word of God. Whether it was the whole Pentateuch or only Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy is at the end. What does he hear at the end? He hears all the blessings for obeying the covenant and all those curses if you do not. By the time it is over, he has heard what Israel should have been doing and he realizes, "We're in horrible trouble." So he tears his garments and sends for a prophet named Huldah. She says, "Yes, absolutely O king." She must have been someone he felt he could trust. She probably spoke the truth reliably, never with minced words. She says, "Yes, these curses will come upon the people of Israel because they have been doing all these kinds of things. They have been worshipping various gods and goddesses; right down the line, basically breaking all of the Ten Commandments, and God will exile His people. However, you O king, because you're interested in this word, because you've repented, because you are sorry, shocked, and ashamed, you are going to be able to continue on and die in peace. You won't see the horrible agonies that will come upon your people soon enough."

B. Covenant Renewal

The king does not settle for that. He says, "We've got to change, we've got to change." 2 Kings 23 describes his renewal of the covenant. He gathers people together and he makes them listen. He has the law read to them, insists that they pay attention, and gives his own speech about the importance of keeping the covenant and so on. In other words, what he does is conduct a covenant renewal of which we have quite a number of samples in the Old Testament. There are nine or ten that are pretty significant covenant renewals:

1. The first covenant, of course, is the one you already know about
2. A renewal for a new generation that grew up in the wilderness in Deuteronomy
3. Joshua 24 has a wonderful covenant renewal speech
4. Samuel's covenant renewal speech in 1 Samuel 12
5. Solomon's renewal prayer in 1 Kings 8
6. 2 Kings 23, the passage we are currently looking at
7. King Asa's very fine covenant renewal in 2 Chronicles 15
8. Ezra has one
9. Nehemiah has one that he enlists Ezra's help with so the two of them together are involved in that one

These covenant renewals have the purpose to bring people back to obedience to the Word of God. The same kind of preaching and teaching that you and I always do in churches; we try to bring people back to the Word of God, not give them something new. We do not say, "Well, that was fine for them but here's the latest." No, we are trying to tell them that God has known all along what our behavior and thinking ought to be; therefore, let's get back to what He revealed long ago and conform ourselves to that truth and let it have its effect on our lives so that we may be beneficiaries of it. Covenant renewal is always looking backwards in the best sense, conforming self or group to the covenant that already exists and has already been revealed and you renew.

What Josiah did is really enlightening to us because when you read about the things that he eliminated, you realize how bad things were. I am just reading quickly a portion of chapter 23 starting with verse 4, “The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank, and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts.” Right in the Jerusalem temple was any number of alters, rooms, eating places, and so on, associated with these various idols. “He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel.” Why to Bethel? Bethel was an old, corrupt center of heterodox worship starting with the days of Jeroboam the first, Solomon’s successor in the north, and Josiah wanted that stuff to be done away with. “He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people.” That was done because the idea was that that which is dead is defiled, and if you take this and scatter it over graves there is no way it can ever be undefiled. It is kind of an extreme measure, but he is serious. He wants to clean up the nations act. “He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord and where women did weaving for Asherah.” The Asherah pole would be where the sign effectively saying “Asherah” on it would be, it was almost like a big sign saying Exxon or something, and it is a place where people would come to engage in occult sex. Also, if you were a homosexual, you could come and engage in homosexual occult sex. That was the kind of thing going on right in the temple.

It goes on and talks about all the other kinds of things that he did. There were child sacrifice locations as verse 10 describes; he got rid of that. In verse 11 there were the horses right at the entrance to the temple that symbolized pulling the chariot for the sun and the moon; he got rid of those. If you read it all, you realize that Yahweh was practically obscured by all these other worship methods and idols and so on. The nation had really become ultra-corrupt. He had a lot of cleaning up to do, it really was a significant thing, but it is an encouraging story.

I am sure that many of you who start ministry, whether it is youth ministry or pastoral ministry, Christian education ministry, missions, or whatever, are going to go into your first assignment into some church or situation that is not going to be very healthy and you are going to find all kinds of weakness. You will find people who have long ago given up, you find that there may not be much knowledge or orthodoxy at all, that the leadership in the past may not have preached or taught the Gospel, and that it is easy to get discouraged and say, “This is hopeless. How in the world am I going to handle this?” Be encouraged by the kind of revival that a king like Josiah could bring about with proper resolve and by immediately getting control of the nominating committee which I certainly recommend in any church. You can begin to operate and make some changes. It is a challenge; it is not easy, and you will shed a lot of tears, you will pray a huge amount, but you will find allies, you will lead people to Christ, you will begin to build a momentum, and you can turn a church around. It is wonderful to see it.

You can take a youth group where it is entertainment-based and gradually but steadily make it discipleship-based, and what a change you will see. You will see kids thrilled to go to prayer meetings in a church. You will see them thrilled to go to Bible study and say this counts for something, whereas if you just take them on one more roller coaster ride it will be just another roller coaster ride. You cannot out-entertain the world but you can certainly out-disciple it. There is a lot of wonderful things that can take place.

Nevertheless, this is against the backdrop of the fact that the Babylonian Empire is coming. In Josiah’s time reigning, about 640 to 609 BC, the Assyrian Empire, the one that we have been talking about before are the big oppressors.

C. Josiah's Big Mistake

Josiah at the end of chapter 23 makes a big mistake. He had the idea that so often prevails in international relations, “The enemy of my enemy must be my friend.” He knew toward the end of his reign that the Babylonians were trying to take over the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonians did not like paying tax, toll, and tribute any more than anybody else did, so they had organized themselves and had rebelled against the Assyrians. They were gaining strength, getting allies, grouping, fighting, and beginning to capture more and more territory from the Assyrians who were very actively fighting the Babylonians. From about 611 BC to 605, for that long period of time, it was a very lengthy war, the Babylonians gained more and more ground and the Assyrians lost more and more. So, the Assyrians appealed in 609 BC to the Egyptians. They said, “we will pay you very well if you will send troops.” Every government is always looking for more money. That was one thing that was done in ancient times; governments would accept money and use that for the payment of troops and supply troops to other governments as allies. The Egyptians, under Pharaoh Neco, were marching north through Israel to go link up with the Assyrians to form a coalition to try to fight against the Babylonians and Josiah made a mistake. A lot of great people in Scripture makes huge mistakes. Their hearts are good, their desires are right but they forget that they are supposed to depend entirely on the Lord and not try to work it all out themselves. Usually we have it all figured out. We know what has to happen instead of saying, “God knows what has to happen. He’ll figure out how to do it and I will simply respond and try to carry out His will.”

Josiah thought, “if the Egyptians are cut off so that they cannot link up with the Assyrians, that will give the Babylonians a chance to win. After all, who could be worse than the Assyrians?” The answer was, of course, the Babylonians, but he did not know that. He just thought, “Nobody could be worse than these Assyrians. It’s been oppressive, it’s been horrible, we hate it. They are the worst, the meanest.” If you have ever read the Book of Nahum, you know they were pretty bad. Of course he wanted relief.

Therefore, he got his Judean troops into battle against Egypt. He could not succeed, he did not win, and he himself was mortally wounded and died in 609 BC. The Egyptians did link up with the Assyrians but it did not work; the Babylonians were by that time all too powerful and conquered and became the possessors of what had previously been the entire Assyrian Empire. Then, from the end of chapter 23 into chapter 25 you read about a succession of kings who were the kings of the last days of Judah and who were the experiencers of the decline and eventual capture by Babylon.

D. The Practice of Exile

The Babylonians did the following—they practiced exile just as the Assyrians had done and all kinds of people before them. The idea was that you could keep a conquered territory relatively suppressed by deporting to a distant location nearly all of the leadership including the royal family, people in government service, people well-educated and so on. Take them all, anybody who might lead a rebellion against you, deport them to a distance, replace them if you need to with other people, and that will minimize the likelihood of their rebelling against you and you having to spend lots of money to bring your troops back in, suppress them once again, increase the tax, toll, and tribute and so on. The idea was to get the tax, toll, and tribute money as conveniently and comfortably as you possibly can year after year. Get rid of the problem people and have everybody else contribute to your wealth.

1. Therefore, in 605 BC the Babylonians exiled a number of Israelites. Daniel went in that exile.

2. In 598 BC they were back again and this time they exiled a king named Jehoiachin. His name is important because of the way that 2 Kings ends. With Jehoiachin went thousands of people. It was a fairly substantial exile.

3. After him the Babylonians put on the throne what we call a “puppet king,” a king of their choosing. And they had that king, whose name was Zedekiah, do their will, but even Zedekiah eventually got a big head. He decided he might be able to rebel against the Babylonians, because after a few years you hate that tax, toll, and

tribute and you are thinking of rebellion constantly. He organized a rebellion, fortified Jerusalem, and put in all kinds of stores for a long siege because he knew there would be one. He then thumbed his nose at the Babylonians in 588 BC. They came immediately and began the siege of Jerusalem which broke after two years and the Babylonians occupied the city Zedekiah had. Zedekiah was blinded after seeing his children put to death. They put his children to death and then blinded him so the last thing he would have seen on this earth would be his children being killed in front of him. That was the style of the Babylonians. Then they took tens of thousands of Israelites into exile; massive, massive exile. That is really *the* exile; that is the big one; that is the beginning of the period of curse.

E. Jehoiachin at the King's Table

We read this at the very end of 2 Kings. We read starting with verse 27, "In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah," that is all the way down from 598 to about sometime around 551 or so, "in the year of a *Evil-Merodach*," sounds really bad, but it really just means *man of the god Marduc*, "became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month." This was someone who knew Jehoiachin and released him from prison. He "spoke kindly to him, gave him a seat of honor higher than the other kings who were with him in Babylon." Lots of kings had been exiled to Babylon; the Judean king was not the only one. "So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes for the rest of his life and ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived," for centuries.

Skeptical scholars said, "This is pure fiction; just a fabrication, just pious Jews of a later time adding a positive note on a tragedy to try to give some hope. Why would any Babylonian king, especially after thirty-seven years, release an obscure Israelite king like Jehoiachin who had reigned less than a year? He only reigned a few months before he was taken into exile. There is no motive. It is just silly the idea that they would give him a seat of honor higher than all other kings. There were kings of great nations, powerful lands; you are not going to have the Judean king singled out. All obvious fabrication, obviously fictional, obviously people looking from a self-interested point of view at this history and making up a minor happy ending. That was the prevailing view until a young researcher named Donald Weizman, teaching at the University of London, found among the tens of thousands of tablets in the British museum a tablet describing Evil Merodach's food distribution for captured kings. That tablet is published; you can read it in *Ancient Near Eastern Text* by Pritchard in the library, there are several copies of it. It talks about various kings and lists their names.

This is actually provision now, eating at the king's table, the king providing for them. Low and behold you come to a king named Jehoiachin; there it is, it is Jehoiachin written in Babylonian characters. It says he gets such and such. You look at it and you compare it to all other kings on the list and he has got about three times as much. There it is. It just happens that God preserved a tablet from twenty-five hundred years ago that would demonstrate the historicity absolutely perfectly of this passage. Now, of course, skeptics always say, "Oh yes, of course, that is historical, anybody knows that," but not the rest.

Jeremiah

I. Orienting Data

We are looking at prophets who reflect, in part, the time period that we are dealing with and the Babylonian pressure and the difficulties that the Babylonians bring about. The first of these is Jeremiah.

A. Long Career as a Prophet

Jeremiah starts his ministry in 627 BC, five years before the great revival that Josiah brought about. It is not stated for us in 2 Kings, but there are lots of things are not stated. For example, the reason that Jehoiachin was so favored in exile by Evil Merodach the Babylonian king, although it probably is due to the influence of Daniel, but that is not stated because it is God who makes it happen and who He uses is a secondary issue. It is the fact that He made it happen. Likewise, God brought about the revival of Josiah.

He used Jeremiah and a number of other prophets to accomplish it, but he is the author of the revival. The role of Jeremiah is wonderful to observe and interesting and challenging to see. Here is an overview that relates to it.

Here is a prophet who prophesies for forty-two years, from 627 to 585 BC; that is a long career. He is spanning the time from the Assyrian domination, because the Assyrians were strong in 627 when he starts, to 585 when the Babylonians have destroyed Judah. He even ends up preaching to the exiles as they are heading down to Egypt. At the end of his career, Jeremiah witnessed a stupid thing that a number of Judeans tried to do: assassinate the Babylonian governor.

The Babylonians had appointed a guy name Gedaliah, the governor of Judah, because they made Judah just a district in their empire. A number of Jews thought, "Well, we will assassinate this guy and that will bring about a popular uprising and we will throw off the Babylonian yoke," and so on. It was a crazy idea that failed completely; not the assassination but the uprising. Then they were all terrified and knew that the Babylonian troops would be coming very soon, so they decided to head for Egypt. Hundreds and hundreds of people in large groups headed down for Egypt. Jeremiah went after them basically saying, "Look, get your lives right with the Lord, keep His law, and keep His covenant. In the Lord there is hope for the future." They basically answered, "No, we think we'll try idolatry once again."

The poor guy is at the end of his life, after all the faithfulness of his preaching, was once again rejected even after all his words came true. He predicted the exile and the Babylonian victory, but we see him fade out. By our knowledge, we cannot know how much longer he lived in Egypt, but we see the fade out of his ministry as the crowds of people keep asking, "Why should we?"

B. Emphases

1. Prophet to the Nations

Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations. This is a very big theme now. The great empires are changing. The Assyrian Empire will be taken over by the Babylonians during his calling. He predicts in three different places that the Babylonians will eventually come to their end; he predicts that there will be a seventy year period of Babylonian domination and then the Persians will come. He does not predict by name the Persians, but he predicts the fact that the Babylonian Empire will be swallowed up by yet another empire. We have this idea of many substantial, vast changes and all of these empires swallowing up little Judah.

So God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. We have this call in Jeremiah 1:4-5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah says in a typical, formal protest that he is not unwilling to be a prophet but only that he do not have the ability. "I don't know how to speak; I am only a child." Of course he speaks this so he obviously knows how to speak. It is classic proof of the fact that it is a formal protest; it is a statement of unworthiness and then comes the reassurance.

"But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you to. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth." So that is the experience he had. Presumably an angel actually did it, but that is how he words it. "Now I have put my words in your mouth. I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot, tear down, destroy, overthrow, build and plant." Then comes various prophecies. In other words, Jeremiah understood from this calling that he would be explaining, predicting, and describing the vast, rapid changes among nations on behalf of the Lord. Nations come, nations go, empires come, empires go, and that is going to be the subject material that you will preach about a great deal. An awful lot of Jeremiah is about the vast, dramatic, political developments of his day and how God is behind them.

2. God Causes the Babylonian Invasion

God is causing the Babylonian invasion. He sent the Babylonians, it is His purpose, so do not fight the Babylonians. As you can imagine, this is not well-received in Judah. "What do you mean, don't fight? They're our enemy. They're terrible to us, they're cruel. They turned out to be as bad or worse than the Assyrians. Why wouldn't we fight them, why would we just give in?" But he says, "No, you are supposed to give in because they are God's agents of punishment for you, a covenant people who have not kept the covenant." So Jeremiah is constantly in trouble for treason, he is hated by the government, and he is considered to be an underminer of the people's confidence. He was a skillful and eloquent prophet, and when people listened to him all the fight went out of them. So naturally there is a lot of government persecution of this prophet and one reads about that in the stories about Jeremiah.

He also reassured the people that while this had to happen, it would not last forever. You are not going to just endlessly be under Babylonian domination, you are not going to endlessly have to live without hope, with no expectation of a good future, but rather, there will be positive times ahead. In chapter 29, he writes a long letter to people who are in exile. Some of these people were there in the exile of 598 and, in all likelihood, that is the main set of recipients, but it may also have been that there were some others there for whatever reason. Anyway, it is mainly people exiled in 598 along with Jehoiachin.

In verse 5, "Build houses, settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give you daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you will profit." Then in verse 8, "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them."

What were these prophets and deceivers prophesying? We have plenty of evidence from the text of Jeremiah of what they were doing. They were saying this will be a short exile. It was everywhere. You can see it also reflected in the Book of Ezekiel and other places. The word was, "Thus says the Lord. Thus says Yahweh, the Lord. You won't be in exile long; I'll bring you back to Judah, I'll throw off the yoke of the Babylonians." That is what was being preached in Judah; "These Babylonians will be out of here soon, don't worry," all kinds of positive predictions.

This people were claiming that they were speaking in the name of the Lord. They were claiming that God had given them these revelations and they were just repeating them to the crowd. People loved to hear that. “Well, if Yahweh says so, that is good.” Then you have poor Jeremiah saying, “Thus says the Lord, these other guys are not speaking for me.” It is a very difficult situation to be in. He says this in verse 10, “This is what the Lord says: ‘When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come back to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, I will bring you back for captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I had banished you and I will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’” It is going to happen. There is a great future. There is a wonderful hope ahead. But, it is going to be seventy years from now; a lifetime.

Imagine being fifty years old and hearing this and saying, “It is not going to be during my lifetime.” Imagine being anything but a little kid and having any expectation that maybe you would see that wonderful, glorious return back from oppressive Babylonian captivity again to the promise land. What he is saying is, “Hey, be encouraged, God has a wonderful plan, but for you who have just gone into exile with Jehoiachin, it will be your grandchildren. You guys settle down, stay there, because you’re in for the long haul. These Babylonians are not going away any time soon.” That is part of the message that he preached and that they had to understand.

C. This Sub-Themes

1. Blessing / curse / blessing pattern

He is hitting the fact that there will be a curse. It is a substantial curse they are entering upon, and they cannot assume that it will just be over in a matter of a few years. It is going to be a lifetime of terrible, oppressive disaster. The awful exile will last a “lifetime of seventy years” and people eventually took his seventy-year promise seriously. Eventually, they took it very seriously. If you count seventy years down from 586, you get 516 BC. 516 BC became a huge target date for the people of Judah, especially with regard to the completion of the second temple.

They eventually said, “You know, Jeremiah said seventy years. All his words were true.” This was a group able to see that Jeremiah was right at the end of the exile period; the immediate group did not see it, not in 586, but it sunk in more and more as some decades went by. People said, “If he said seventy years, he meant seventy years. He didn’t say sixty-eight, he didn’t say seventy-four, he said seventy. They took very seriously the fact that they had to get their act together by the end of year 70 or they might just be missing out on God’s favor. We will look further at how that translates itself into some of the statements made in Scripture and some of the actions of the post exilic community, how seriously that seventy-year period came about.

Blessing/curse/blessing and people want the restoration blessing to come in. it is a very serious thing to be told, “The curse is coming now and what you don’t want to do is to just say oh well, that’s fine, I’ll just wait for the blessing.” No, you get serious about trying to please God so that the blessing might come back because he does after all say, “You will seek me and find me when,” and it can also be translated if in verse 13, you can translate it if or when, “or if you seek me with all your heart.” In other words, there is a condition here. This is not just a “you do nothing and I will do everything.” This is “you show me repentance and I will take care of the rest.” We have the very same kind of message in the Christian Gospel when we say, “You do not have to do everything nor be something, you just have to be sorry for your sins and ask God to come into your life, and He will do it.” He does not leave you there and say, “That’s that, you’ve done enough.” No, immediately He expects progress. That certainly is true. He does not expect it before conversion, only after.

2. The relationship of prophets and disciples

The relationship of prophets and disciples. Let's draw your attention to this: Jeremiah is our most detailed source for knowledge about the relationship of prophets and disciples. This is because of places like Jeremiah 36, but that is just one place. You can really see how Jeremiah interacts with his most prominent disciple, most prominent student and assistant, Baruch. But, I certainly want to put this in context for you and note that we see this in the relationship between Elijah and Elisha, and then Elisha and John the Baptist with their many disciples.

If you carefully look at all the Gospels, all four, they make it quite clear that Jesus took His first disciples from John. John had trained them, taught them what to expect, and recruited them. When John said, "There is the Lamb of God," pointing to Christ, "I have to decrease and He will increase," part of what he is doing is telling his disciples is this: "There is the guy that I prepared you for, it is time to move on to him." So Jesus' first disciples were originally John's disciples.

With regard to Jeremiah and Baruch you see a focus on one particular disciple, which is something a little special. It individualizes the picture. In the other cases you do not see it as easily. The only other real parallel to that is Elijah and Elisha, which is useful to see, but it is nice to see Jeremiah with a disciple who is not necessarily himself a prophet. Baruch may have become a prophet later. There are some traditions that say he did, but they are only traditions. There is even pseudo epigraphic literature; that is literature purporting to be written by Baruch later toward New Testament times. That is not canonical, that is not Scripture, that is a type of literature that claims to be from somebody. Baruch may or may not have actually come about to be a prophet. He is more of what we would call a lay disciple. So you honestly see Jeremiah functioning something like a pastor to Baruch, which is very interesting to see.

One of the fascinating things to see is Jeremiah dictating his prophecies to Baruch. Something we always wonder about is how the prophetic books got preserved when Amos preached what he preached? How come we have those words? Who wrote them down? Did Amos write them down? Possibly. Did somebody else write them down? Possibly. Was somebody listening and coping them down as he said it, sort of taking shorthand? More likely the prophets memorized these speeches because they thought of themselves as God's messengers. The assumption that any prophet would have said what he said only once and never repeat it seems unlikely. They probably were repeating it periodically to various crowds, maybe throughout a day, or week, or month, saying the same kind of thing.

At any rate, there is a story in Jeremiah about how King Jehoiachin is disgusted with what Jeremiah preaches and all the doom and gloom that Jeremiah gives forth and all of what the king regards as treasonous material. In chapter 36, we read about Jeremiah receiving the word of the Lord to write down the prophecies that he had previously preached. It says in Jeremiah 36:2, "Take a scroll, write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin." In other words, you have been preaching all these years, put it together in a book, assemble all those sermons, and distribute it so people can read it, hear it, and the whole impact will teach them what I have been saying through you and they will get it. That is exactly what happens.

Jeremiah called Baruch and dictated the words to Baruch, his disciple scribe. Jeremiah was essentially on what we call *house arrest* so he could not go into the temple and had Baruch go into the temple and read the prophecies. Chances are, that is what happened lots of times. Many, many of these instances may have been repeated; this is the one that we know about. It may have been routine that you would go hear the reading of what a given prophet had preached. That is part of the way Scripture was built up and preserved. This scroll exists and people hear about it, verse 16, "We must report all these words to the king. Did Jeremiah dictate all this?" Baruch says, verse 18, "Yes, I wrote them in ink on the scroll." "Well," the officials say, "you and Jeremiah go hide,

don't let anyone know where you are." They take the scroll and they bring it into the king in the courtyard and they tell the king. Then the king is sitting in a room with a fire in front of him, in a fire pot, the equivalent of a stove in those days, and this guy Jehudi reads from the scroll. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns the king cut them off with a scribes knife and threw them into the fire pot until the entire scroll was burned. That is not a smart thing to do if the true and living God is the true and living God. Not smart at all to burn His word. But the king shows his contempt for Jeremiah and it says in verse 24, "The king and all his attendants who heard these words showed no fear and didn't tear their clothes." Some of them urged him not to burn it; he just burned it anyway. Verse 27, "After the king had burned the scroll, the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'Take another scroll, write on it all the words that were on the first scroll and tell Jehoiachin,'" the king who did this, "you burned the scroll and therefore all these punishments will happen to you and your family," so the king is taken care of.

Then in verse 32, especially interesting, "Jeremiah took another scroll, gave it to Baruch, and Jeremiah dictated. Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiachin, king of Judah, had burned in the fire and many similar words were added to them." Most interesting. So Jeremiah did repeat everything he had ever preached. He had it memorized; it was clear in his mind. He had probably preached it so often that he was like an actor who played Hamlet. A year later you do not say, "Gee was it 2B or was it 3B or not 3B." No, you know what it says. He has it memorized and therefore to that he adds more. Not because he makes it up but because God gives him further revelations. This may be a glimpse into the way that a disciple was involved in the actual written production of Scripture. A lot of people have said, barring other evidence which we do not have a lot of, it makes sense to assume that most of the prophetic books are probably the written productions by disciples of prophets. They do not make up anything but are preserving. They write it down as it is dictated to them and preserve it. That is a reasonable possibility and one of the sub-themes of the book. Back to the main themes in terms of overview.

D. Corrupt national leadership and its consequences

That is really big, clear theme in the Book of Jeremiah. If the government will not lead righteously, the people will pretty naturally follow the misleading of the government and therefore, they will be in trouble. It is a simple breakdown of the book into four sections, really two big sections plus an appendix or two.

E. Overview

1. Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem. In the first half roughly, these are mostly poems.
2. Then the more biographical material. Baruch could be the author of some of this biographical material. It is hard to know, but it would make perfect sense in light of his significant role in preserving material. It is not that the material in 26-45 is all biography. I do not mean it is just stories about Jeremiah. If you have read through the text, you know that is not what it is. Whatever material is there tends to be mixed in with stories about him. There is much more of a gathering of that type of thing. Things about Jeremiah and things that fit into that context of telling the story in the third person.
3. Then his many foreign nations oracles are collected together because he is a prophet to the nations and his foreign nations oracles are a very big part of what he preached.
4. Finally, the historical conclusion that reflects 2 Kings 24. What happened as described at the end of 2 Kings is appropriate for the readers of Jeremiah to appreciate.

II. Prophets and Opposition

Many prophets have to suffer opposition and Jeremiah happens to be one of our very best sources for appreciating this. But you see it also in Malachi, Haggai, Zechariah, Ezekiel and Isaiah. It is not at all that there is

not a lot of opposition. I just listed here the four groups that gave prophets grief. I would like to say to you who are heading into ministry, do not think that you are not going to get plenty of grief. Any leader gets grief, any business, any organization, every politician is thrilled with a fifty-one percent approval rating. They know you live with opposition, you live with disapproval, you live with people hating your guts, and as long as it is only forty-nine percent you are thrilled. Politicians understand that. It is not that we are to have the cold hearts of politicians or to think of ourselves only in that way; I do not mean that at all. But you do need to understand that it has always been this way. The majority of people rejected Jesus Himself and wanted Him dead. It came to a point that they were happy to have Him dead, demanded that He be killed. Surely we cannot say, "Yeah, but I'm a Christian, I'm going into ministry, I have the Holy Spirit and I'm going to have a wonderful time. It is going to be all positive." No, please, do not be that naive. That is not the way ministry works. Ministry is wonderful because God sustains you through it; not because all the people you deal with will accept every idea, every word, every proposal, every action. No, they will find things to complain about steadily. Get used to it now, it is coming. It does not mean there is no great joy. It is great satisfaction and great joy in any form of ministry or missions or whatever. However, do not be naive and say everybody has to like me because that is not going to happen. That is not the way it works.

A. From False Prophets

A big problem for these prophets were false prophets. They had direct competition from other people who looked good.

1. Paul has the problem with false prophets; they are going all over the place and coming into his churches. These are skillful people, they are winsome, handsome, good at what they accomplish, and people just say, "They are so much more interesting than Paul. They are just so much better speakers. With Paul I feel like Eutychus; I fall asleep real easy." Jeremiah and all the other true prophets have this same problem. The other prophets were clever, they were effective, they used better visual aides, and they had better crowds. The prophets often had musicians with them and the prophets often sang. This is something that we have not talked a lot about but I could prove it to you if I wanted to spend thirty minutes or so, as there is plenty of evidence for this in Scripture. Jeremiah may not have had a very good voice. It is very possible that he was called but actually was not that skillful. For example, Martin Luther. Luther's sermons are so powerful and he had such great effect, but they said of him, "His voice really wasn't that strong and his articulation wasn't that good." He was your average monk. They are not known for being brilliant public speakers. He was not good at what he did. He was always overcoming the weaknesses that he had to deal with. Plenty of his opponents were far more skillful. He just had to rely on the Lord to help him because his own natural talents were not the greatest. Some of that may have been the case with Jeremiah.

2. In Jeremiah 28 there is a wonderful story of his dealing with the false prophet Hananiah and all the problems. He ends up predicting Hananiah's death which does come soon. Even then, people do not say, "Look, that guy predicted the death of Hananiah and therefore....," No, because Hananiah was saying what they wanted to hear. Jeremiah was saying what they did not want to hear. He was saying, "You're in for seventy years of horrible hardship." That is not what people want to hear. Your message can be true and if it is not attractive they will manage to declare it false.

B. Opposition from government

We saw a little of opposition from the government already. Looking at chapter 36 there was plenty of it, and these three chapters represent where we have a lot of that constant grief from the government. In many parts of the world today, this is what pastors' experience; the government is their biggest problem. A lot of churches are technically illegal today and have great grief, so they understand this.

C. Opposition from Priests

Many of the prophets found that the priests had a vested interest in a system. Remember, the priests got a cut of every animal, every loaf of bread, every jar of wine and oil that came into the temple. It was in the vested interest of the priests to be well-liked, to say those things that would bring people, bless them, and encourage them. If a priest says, "Wait a minute! That is not a fit animal for sacrifice. Who are you to bring that in here?" That priest is not going to have the person say, "I'm terribly sorry, take the whole animal." No, the person is saying, "I'm out of here." They just would not worship. That leaves the priest hungry. That is no fun to make yourself hungry by enforcing the law of God. You can see the priest had the terrible challenge.

When Jeremiah comes along and preaches righteous and keeping of the covenant, strict fidelity to it, they do not like him. He is part of the threat to their comfort, to their system that works, to the things that make them happy and so on. This is also a difficult challenge today.

I try to relate these things to you as seminarians because it may be that you will hear this lots, but you will not hear how many ways the Scripture itself is encouraging to you as pastors. It is there for everybody, so also for you as pastors. Sometimes with these prophets it is particularly useful to see it, as you may experience the same kind of thing. You may find that other clergy in your community will be very comfortable with a certain way of operating, and your preaching the Gospel may rub them the wrong way. I cannot imagine that many of you will not find that to be difficult. You will want to be their friend. You are not out to hurt them or be mean to them but they will not like it. It will not be a comfortable thing. You may also find that members of your own congregation will say, "Why can't you be a little more like those people? Why do you have to stir things up so much? These alter calls are embarrassing or whatever." It is a very delicate matter and some of the sort of thing that Jeremiah got from "other clergy" in this case priests. Perfectly legitimate clergy; there is nothing illegal about them, but what they are doing is wrong. You may find that you will appreciate these passages as time goes by because they really will contain things analogous to what you will experience.

D. Then from people in general

Jeremiah was sadly unpopular because it was popular to practice idolatry, it was popular to think in terms of the Babylonians being gotten rid of and to have false hope, and the kinds of things he preached and demanded were not well-received. It was a hard situation for him. Here is a guy with an almost forty-two year ministry and his one sure ally is the Lord Himself. That is the way it ought to be. Make sure you are absolutely right with the Lord because you will need that encouragement. So often the discouragements of rejection will come. By the way, some of these discouragements in ministry are just well-intentioned.

People are not trying to be mean to you, but they will say things like, "Couldn't you say less about the blood of Christ or the death of Christ, those are uncomfortable concepts for us." I predict you will have people say things like that to you. It has been said so many times to me that I cannot imagine that they would not say it to you too. I do not think of myself as constantly preaching about death and blood but to them I am. Other people will say to you things like, "You know, if we could get the service down to forty-five minutes I think it would be far more effective." They will and they are perfectly well-intentioned. They would like more people to come in, it is not cruel and unkind. Their suggestion is that "We have a little more singing and a little less preaching. I think that would do a lot for our church." Some of it is saying that you are not as entertaining a preacher as they would like. It may be true; you may not be all that gifted and brilliant. It can hurt. It is hard to say to them, "No, you need more of me, not less of me." So I encourage you to see Jeremiah, watch him operate, and see that the answer for all your problems is that you need to get yours kicks out of pleasing God. He is your audience. Everything else will go. Do you try to ignore people? No. Do you try to make them unhappy? No, of course not, but you are doomed to failure if you try to please everybody. If you try to please God you are doomed to success, you are slated for success.

III. Prophetic Lament Form

In Jeremiah and a number of other Prophets we observe something we call the *Prophetic Lament Form*. This is a literary form. This is a style of doing something and Jeremiah has a couple of dozen of these, Ezekiel has a whole bunch, and many, many others have them. Remember the Psalms where we had the lament psalms; this is not the same. That was a psalm you pray when you are in distress. This is a lament that may also be called a funerary lament. This is a form that follows the style in the ancient world of lamenting the death of someone. This is the kind of thing you say and do and even sing, because they were singers who sang funerary laments. We know this form from its clearest, easiest to follow example in 2 Samuel chapter 1 where David sings a lament over Saul and Jonathan. There are four elements you observe these.

A. A call to mourning

Everybody ought to mourn. It is a terrible thing, come and let's mourn together. The community mourns. That is what every funeral is. People gather and they are all there to thank God for the life of someone but also to mourn. This is not just a fun time it is a time properly of solemnity and seriousness about what has happened.

B. Direct Address to the Dead

An element that we do not normally have in our culture is direct address to the dead. You will see David talking in his lament to Saul and to Jonathan. Saul you were this—Jonathan you were that.

C. Eulogy

Eulogy means good words. You always talk about the great accomplishments of those who passed on before.

D. Loss to the Survivors

You also talk about the extent of the loss to the survivors; what a big impact the passing of this individual means. What you need to appreciate is this: they do not only use these to lament Israel's spiritual demise. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and several other prophets have lots of these, and many of the prophets have these. That is one way they use these laments. They say, "I'm at the funeral of Israel. Israel, you were a wonderful nation but you have really gone down the drain." That is one way they use it. They also use it as a mocking for ironic funeral dirge, so sometimes it is called the *mocking dirge*. That is a term that you will find in the literature because dirge is an old English word for a funerary lament. They will say it to the Babylonians. They will pretend that they are at the funeral of the Babylonians or the funeral of Babylon and talk about the destruction that will come. Here is one Jeremiah does about Moab in chapter 48: "Woe to Nebo for it will be ruined," that is one of the places in Moab, "Kiriathaim will be disgraced and captured; the stronghold will be disgraced," he is using woe language, the language of death, "Moab praised no more; in Heshbon men will plot her downfall.... You too, madmen will be silenced.... Moab will be broken... They go this way and that..." Then verse 6, direct address, "Run, flee for your lives; become like a bush in the desert. You trust in your deeds and riches you too will be taken captive..." If you go through, you can see descriptions that fit these categories so they can be given in an ironic or mocking fashion of Israel's enemies just as they are given in a truly tragic and sad and heartfelt fashion over Israel itself. Bear this in mind because as you become more familiar with prophetic literature you will see just dozens of these examples of the funerary lament.

Joel and Obadiah

I. Orienting Data for Joel

We now turn to the prophet Joel. It is a short book and we can only give it a relatively short amount of time, but I would like to make the following comments.

A. Locust Invasion or Human Invasion?

First there is an interesting question. Is Joel really, really talking about a locust invasion? It certainly sounds like it. Or, is he metaphorically talking about the Babylonian invasion either of 598 or 588 and describing the Babylonians like locusts. It is hard to tell. People have taken both points of view. Anyway, there is an invasion by unstoppable “locusts”. The invasion continues, there is a call to repentance, a promise of hope, and then a judgment on the nations. It certainly looks like Joel is addressing the national, political, and international concerns in that he is not just talking about locusts. There are, however, scholars who have argued that he is just talking about locusts. One scholar who believed that said that “He is a minor cult prophet.” He is all worked up over a locust plague, which are not easy things. They are hard and part of the way God can judge.

However, it seems like something else may actually be his concern, especially considering 2:11: “The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” That sounds an awful lot more like a human army and a human invasion than a locusts plague.

However, you will see when reading about Joel that this issue is a pattern. This makes dating the book difficult. If it is a Babylonian invasion, fine, you are almost sure it is either 598 or 588. It just sounds like a human army. Then certainly, it comes that if it is a human army it is going to be one of the invasions we know about. If, on the other hand, it is a locust’s plague, we do not have any history of locust plagues. So, could Joel be writing in the ninth century, eighth century, seventh century, sixth, fifth, fourth, or third even. People have come up with dates for all of those possibilities. That is part of the challenge. It is a wonderful story of hope and of God’s hope for His people by reason of judgment on the nations.

B. Four big themes in Joel

1. *The day of the Lord*

In the ancient world there was a very widespread popular notion that when a truly great king went to battle, he could win his war in a day. If King X got into a war with King Y, if King X were truly a great sovereign than he would demolish King Y in a day. There are really many, many references to this idea that in one day you can overcome the enemy. I collected these and wrote an article back in 1976 called *The Sovereign’s Day of Conquest* in the *Bulletin of the American Schools in Oriental Research*. I just marshal all of the evidence, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Hittite and so on, lots and lots of evidence for this notion.

This appears to be something that God inspired the prophets to pick up on because there is no greater sovereign than the Lord Himself. If there is a need to eliminate evil, to go to war against what is corrupt and the Lord chooses to do so, it is going to be over in a day. It is not going to be the week of Yahweh, the month of Yahweh, the year of Yahweh; it is going to be the day of Yahweh, the day of the Lord. It will be a decisive day of divine intervention against injustice and in favor of righteousness. It will be a great reversal of everything that is improper. Joel really does talk about that. That is what he is talking about—A great invasion, a call to repentance, the expectation that there is a need to get right with God because that day of the Lord is dreadful, Joel 2:11. Who

can endure it? Who can fight God? Who can think that he can stand up against the Lord? Will the Lord do what he does only by military means? No, of course not.

The ultimate victory is spiritual just like Zachariah says, another “day of the Lord prophet”. Zachariah says, “Not by might, nor by power but by my spirit, says the Lord.” Joel has a comparable message. We read in Joel 2:28, after a lot of discussion about decisive military intervention, great armies and so on, and he says, “Then I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

That time is of huge importance. If you make the wrong decision, boy is it a disaster. If you make the right decision it is fabulous. Because “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.” The day of the Lord, decisive, decisive, which side are you on? If you are on the right side it is great; you are on the winning side and it is all over quickly. If you are on the wrong side, it is a disaster for you. That theme is here in Joel who is one of the day of the Lord prophets with a heavy “day of the Lord” emphasis.

2. Oracles Against Foreign Nations

He also certainly has oracles against foreign nations. He has some in general in chapter 3:1-8. He says, “I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.” That is a convenient name because Jehoshaphat means *the Lord will judge*. So the Valley of the Lord will judge just works perfectly. “I will come into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, and I will deal with people who have abused and misused the people in any way.”

3. War Oracles

He also has war oracles. These are sometimes subcategories of judgement oracles. A great example the one in Hosea 5:5-8, but there are many other places where war oracles occur. In these war oracles you have predictions of battle. Joel 3:9, “Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say I am strong. Come quickly, all you nations from every side and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord!” So you have God coming with His angelic warriors against all the nations of the earth to judge them and it melts, thus, into a judgment oracle.

4. Democratization of the Spirit

Certainly one of the wonderful, special contributions of this book is its emphasis on the democratization of the Spirit, not merely the coming great judgment of the Holy Spirit. What do we mean by that? In Old Testament times, prophets have the Spirit of God. The Spirit might specially guide them. They could even be described as filled with the Spirit. A couple of the craftsmen who build the tabernacle are described as filled with the Spirit. Moses and the elders of Israel are described as filled with the Spirit. But generally, people were not. Most people just had to learn God’s covenant, learn His law, learn what was right and wrong and do their best to live by it. The New Covenant that is predicted by Joel and other prophets is looking forward to a time when the least of God’s people, the newest Christian, the most uninformed Christian, the Christian having the most trouble trying to live the Christian life, will have a relationship to God through His Spirit better than anybody in the Old Covenant every had. That is a really fantastic thing. We call this the democratization of the Spirit, the Spirit on everybody, on all the people.

Jesus says it this way, “I tell you the truth, of men born of women, John the Baptist is the greatest, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Even a prophet as great as John the Baptist is not in the same relationship to God that any of us are in Christ. It is a wonderful thing. So the role of the Holy Spirit is powerful. Note what is said here, “I’ll pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.” Not one gender or the other but both, they are linked together. It is not gender limited. “Old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” It is not age limited. “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” It is not status limited. The Holy Spirit is given without regard to gender, without regard to age, without regard to status, therefore, how foolish to say, “He’s too young, we can’t let him go on our evangelistic team.” That is bad thinking. Parents might say, “He is too young, he is still in third grade,” you do not want him to go to Costa Rica for four months during the school year. That is another reason, but that is not saying that he is too young to be led by God’s Spirit. “This kid is too young to accept Christ as Savior, only two and a half years old, no way.” If the kid says yes and appears to be real, by all means consider it.

Nor should we ever say somebody is too old. “Sorry, you’re in your eighties now, you ought to retire, just relax, let other people carry on the work of the kingdom.” Bad, bad advice. Nor should we say, “You’re not of the right social status. This is white-collar church, you don’t belong.” Do not do that kind of thing. Nor should we say, “You’re a woman, therefore...” There is never a “you’re a woman therefore,” as far as I can tell in Scripture. There is never a “you’re a man therefore,” either in Scripture. It is not that the gifts and calling of God are gender limited, not in the age of the Spirit. This is a wonderful text about the democratization of the Holy Spirit and the significance that has for us and seeing the power of God operate in our world.

II. Obadiah

Now to Obadiah, even smaller book, even quicker look.

A. Oracle against Edom

There are more oracles against foreign nations directed against Edom than any other foreign nation, a very interesting statistic. If you count them up as I have done, you will see that there are more anti-Edom oracles than against any other foreign nations. Edom was not a very big nation. If you look at a map and you see Edom down kind of south of and around the Dead Sea you say, “Gee, it is a tiny, little place.” Rough, hard scabbled wilderness area. Not very nice farmlands there or anything. No really big cities. Not a huge nation at any time. Why then do God’s prophets spend so much time? They are inspired to do it. But why do they spend so much time and attention on Edom? More anti-Edom prophecies than against anyone.

B. Edom During the Babylonian Siege of Jerusalem

Even against Babylon, Egypt, or Assyria, there are not as many as against Edom. The answer is that Edom had this absolute, consistent, constant, traditional enmity toward Judah. It starts way back in the Book of Genesis with the rivalry of Jacob and Esau, and the ancestors of each nation had a rivalry. That continues as you read stories in Exodus and Numbers, especially Numbers, about how the Israelites want to go through the territory of Edom just to get to the Promise Land. “Look, we don’t want to give you grief, we aren’t going to give you trouble, we just want to walk through.” The Edomites will not even let them do that. They give them grief and threaten to fight with them so the Israelites have to skirt the territory. It continues on and on.

It comes to one of its many foci with Obadiah. When the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem for two years, from 588 to 586 BC, thousands upon thousands had to hold up in Jerusalem; they were surrounded, they could not get out. That meant that almost nobody could be out generally in the countryside farming and taking care of their flocks and so on. That means that Judean farmlands were basically sitting empty. The Edomites, perennial enemies of the Judeans, of Israel in general, but they are nearest the Judeans, said “Look, there it is, the

Babylonians are dealing with these people, they have made themselves odious to the Babylonians. We capitulated right away.” The Edomites were among the groups that said, “We won’t fight. Whatever you make us pay we’ll pay, we’re not going to fight.” So they capitulated immediately to the Babylonians and did not resist so that had great freedom but had to pay the heavy tax, toll, and tribute. One way to do this is simply to take over Judean farmlands.

So large numbers of Edomites filtered up into empty towns and villages all over southern Judah, and that is made reference to here in Obadiah. He says in verse 12 talking directly to Obadiah, “You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune,” that is the Babylonian conquest, “nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster.” That is what was happening. The Edomites said, “Hey, ours for the taking, no Babylonians around to bother us, nobody else, and no Judeans.” So they just took over the Promise Land. They actually invaded and captured some of the Promise Land. This is why they have offended God; they deserve well to be criticized.

In addition, they also curried favor with the Babylonians by rounding up Judean refugees and turning them over to Babylon. You have this in verse 14, “You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives,” that is Judean fugitives, “nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.” What is going to happen to Obadiah? Day of the Lord again. Verse 15, “The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Just as you drank on my holy hill,” meaning that Edomites actually came in and plundered even Jerusalem itself, they drank on God’s holy hill, that would mean plundering of Jerusalem “so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.” In other words, they will sort of drink into oblivion. “But on Mount Zion will be deliverance...The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble...” It is like that line that Danny DiVito delivers brilliantly in the movie *The Jewel of the Nile* where he says to Michael Douglas, “You’re a rear end and I’m a lawnmower.” That is the modern equivalent of “I’m fire and you’re stubble.” They took advantage of the Babylonian attack, they grabbed farmlands, turned fleeing refugees over, and then sold refugees into slavery. That is not nice. Obadiah is talking about that, condemning them, saying that God will do the same kinds of things to Edomites, “Your time will come, you’ll suffer.” They did. The Edomites, in history, faded fast as a people and were possessed by others.

C. What God Will Do for Israel

Then it ends with what God will do for Judah and Israel. He will improve their lot, make things get better and better, bring people back from exile, and deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau and the kingdom will belong to Yahweh; the kingdom will be the Lords. What we have in Obadiah, in a way, is not at all unusual. It is just like the oracles against foreign nations and that big block of material from Jeremiah 46-51 or the oracles against foreign nations in Isaiah or Ezekiel or elsewhere. It is just like that except that Obadiah gives us is just one foreign nation oracle. He may have prophesied plenty of things, but this was the thing he was known for. This is the one that got written down, preserved, and made a whole book.

Here is his relatively small out-written output and it is all on a single theme. It happens to be a single foreign nation oracle against Edom that becomes a book. In other cases that would be just a small part of a great, big major prophet. For Obadiah, that is it. That is the topic of his book. It is not a different thing; it is just the kind of thing you find elsewhere. In this case one book; all by itself constituting a book. In a way we do not do justice to the many interesting and effective themes that we have in a book like Obadiah, but that is part of the challenge and benefit of a rapid overview. You sacrifice some precision and certainly a lot of detail in favor of the big picture which is what we are always trying to give. So I hope that you are not discouraged by the fact that we spent 4.8 minutes on Obadiah and that is it because that is the way it should be and it is appropriate.

Habakkuk and Zephaniah

I. Habakkuk

Here is Habakkuk. It is pretty likely we can date Habakkuk. There is some debate but he is clearly talking about the Babylonians coming in and we know when the Babylonian Empire was, 609-540. When did the Babylonians invade? The answer is it could have been the first invasion in 605; that is very minor. More likely it is the invasion of 598 or even more likely the invasion of 588. That is what Habakkuk sees. Habakkuk says to God, "How can this be? God, I don't get it. I see the Babylonians, a very evil, corrupt people. They are not godly. They do not have any covenant; they are not keeping a covenant. They are not pleasing you. They are idolatrous. They are wicked. They are brutal. They are cruel. They kill anybody in their path. When they capture a nation, they bleed it financially. How can this be? How can You let this happen?"

A. First Complaint

He gives what is traditionally called "his first complaint". Complaint just describing the misery that these Babylonians are taking over the known world. "They are coming. They are awful. We see them. How O Lord can you allow this to be so? I don't get it." God gives a reply and his reply is, The Babylonians are My agents to do exactly what I want because they are wiping out and punishing injustice in all kinds of forms." That is an answer, that I'm using them, that is all purposeful. That is why they are having such success.

B. Second Complaint

"Well, how can you let them then have this success?" The answer then is, "Well, it is only temporary." Habakkuk says what Jeremiah says or what Isaiah said implicitly without naming Babylon or what any number of other prophets also say, "Babylon also will fall." In the middle of this there is really an amazing message that God provides and that is the message about how you live when all this is happening. It is one thing for God to help Habakkuk to understand that this is all part of a great historical process and that when one looks back from eternity upon the history of the world, one will see that God never let injustice go completely out of hand. He always had means of punishing and of changing and of defeating an oppressor nation, sometimes most often by another oppressor nation, but He always will do that kind of thing. That is one message but there is the other question, what do you do in the meantime? How is it that you are supposed to somehow survive. What do you do in this wicked world. We are not seeing Babylonian invasions per say and so on but we are seeing all the deterioration in our culture, all the kinds of crummy things that people listen to in music or see on television or in movies, all the pornography, all the junk, everything. We just see so much decline, so much deterioration. What do you do? How do you live when all that is taking place, when it seems like everything is getting worse, not better? That is the wonderful message almost buried in Habakkuk. It is not really that way but to the casual reader it can seem that way.

As you know, this message about how the righteous live by faith became a turning point message not merely for Paul who preached it and expounded it in books like the Book of Romans but also for people like Martin Luther. It was Martin Luther who said, "That's it." He had grown up in this very sad, medieval and following tradition of the church, this is just the way all Christians were thinking that you had to please God by your good works. That is what it was. Amazingly people basically could not see what the New Testament says plainly. They really could not see that; it was not visible to people. A culture can so permeate your thinking that you do not even have recognition categories for what the Bible is actually saying to you plainly.

C. The Just Shall Live By Faith

The whole concept of works righteous was rampant. Luther finally said, “No.” It is what Paul says in Romans quoting Habakkuk, “The just will live by faith.” That is the principle, it is salvation by faith. That is what you have got to get. Are works important? Absolutely, they come immediately thereafter. They should come, they are positive, and you do want to live a righteous life but righteous, actual life that God gives you, is obtained by faith, not works. Therefore, as Paul says, “Nobody can brag. No way you can ever say I earned it. Nobody can ever say that. God will not allow anybody to say I earned by salvation. It cannot happen. The church during the next thousand years tries to help people earn their salvation. That is how bad things went, how off the wall theology drifted. Habakkuk is the basis of that and you can easily miss it. Here is the thing—with all this trouble, how do you live, what do you, what do you do in a wicked world, a fallen world with all its faults? God says to Habakkuk in 2:2, “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets,” then it says in the NIV which I am reading from, “so that a herald may run with it.” Then it gives a footnote, “So that whoever reads it may run with it.” I think it actually says so that even somebody running by can read it. It is so big, like a billboard, that even if you are zipping by you can say, “I saw what that said.” Write it big. “The revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks to the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it certainly will come and not delay,” and this whole thing about what God has in mind. “Look, he is puffed up: his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith.” Then it goes on to talk more about the Babylonians, how greedy the Babylonian nation is and all that but just stuck there virtually like a parenthesis is the statement, “By the way, the righteous live by faith.” It is a great statement and in the midst of all the garbage that the Israelites have to endure in these hard times comes the statement, “The just, or the righteous will live by faith.” Chapter 3 then is very interesting because, what is God’s ultimate solution? It is always deliverance; God is a rescuer, He is a Savior, He is a deliverer; that is who God is. He is always evangelizing, bringing people to faith and saving them from sin and from death. In the third chapter of Habakkuk this is portrayed as a new exodus. Habakkuk is not the only one to have such a theme.

D. New Exodus

There is a lot of new exodus language in Isaiah and in some of the other prophets as well but Habakkuk has it in a very beautiful way. If you read his prayer, it really comes around to being what we would call a history hymn. It is just like that category of hymns, the history hymn. Verse 3, “God gave from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.” Those are locations down in the general Edomite area around which the Israelites marched. “His glory covered the heavens and his splendor and so on like this. Plague went before him; pestilence followed him. He shook the earth, made the nations tremble, the ancient mountains collapse. He goes up through Midian, the angry rivers. He crosses, he splits the earth. The sun and the moon stand still.” Read about that in Joshua chapter 10 and so on. You just follow the story and it is God leading His people in a great new exodus up from the south into the Promise Land. Thus, there is encouragement. What do you do? Do you say, “Yeah, that is all theoretical?” No, in the present time when things are hard, you still trust in the Lord. The righteous lives now by faith. In this particular hymn it is put this way, verse 17 and 18 of the last chapter, though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, all the crops fails, fields produce no food, no sheep in the pen, no cattle in the stalls, I am going to rejoice in the Lord. I am going to be joyful in my Savior. You can have real joy says Habakkuk in this fallen world. You do not have the joy from the fallen world, however, that is not where the joy comes. The joy comes in spite of the fallen world. It is a great message.

II. Zephaniah

Zephaniah, another short book. Zephaniah is a day of the Lord prophet visibly and openly so.

A. Historical Setting

It appears that Zephaniah is preaching in a time contemporaneous with Jeremiah, from everything that we can figure out. It says he preached during the reign of Josiah, King of Judah. That is when Jeremiah started too. It appears that he did preach also in those few years prior to the great revival of 622 BC. Jeremiah started in 627 and preached for five years before the revival. Apparently in that same time period also Zephaniah preached. Here are two prophets that we know about who were pushing the same kinds of things, "Watch out! Judgment is coming unless you repent." They were helping pave the way for the Josiah revival. That is kind of the historical setting.

B. "Day of the Lord" Prophecy

In chapter 1 and on into part of chapter 2 there is a very powerful day of the Lord prophecy and it actually contains much what we would call hyperbole. Hyperbola is exaggeration for effect. You overdo in order to be sure that the impact that you want to make is made. Here is how he says it, Zephaniah 1:2, "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth." That looks like at least as bad as the flood under Noah. It is literal? No, not really. It is not really what is being described but it is a description of cataclysmic judgment. God is going to eliminate evil and make a big difference in this world and so the possibility of repentance is always in the background. "Gather together before the appointed time arrives says chapter 2:2. "Before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath. Seek the Lord, seek righteous, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered from the day of the Lord's anger." This is an angle on the day of the Lord that is useful to get. Day of the Lord, great judgment, it sounds horrible and horrific, who can endure it, who can stand it, it is dreadful, it is this it is that. But the prophets are also saying, "But you know, no matter what happens physically to you in this world, if you can be right with God you're okay, it all bypasses ultimately, then you are in a separate track and you are protected and blessed from God." They are always calling people to be rescued, to get out of the danger zone and to be in the right position. Zephaniah then gives a number of oracles against foreign nations but does not have one against Edom. He must have forgot because it is so popular. No, not necessarily. But he does not happen to have one; most prophets do.

Then when he is attacking Assyria he shifts neatly into attacking Israel. It may even be that when people heard him preach this they did not even notice the transition. In his attack on Assyria at the end of chapter 2 he is saying, "This is the city that thought itself safe. She said I am and there is none besides me. What a ruin she has become; a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists." Then he goes on to say, "Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one, accepts no corruption." Well, it sounds like it is still Assyria maybe. Then he says, "She does not trust in the Lord, does not draw near to her God." You have to say he is talking about Jerusalem now. But same kind of judgment language now against Jerusalem. That means he is really hitting hard the corruption of that day.

But God never leaves this story untold. He does not say, "That's it, I'm going to punish everybody and good for them." There is always a hope, always a prediction of the good things to come. So this book ends with some wonderful predictions about a great future. He says in the very last verse, "At that time I will gather you; I will bring you home; I will give you honor and praise among the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes says the Lord." That is the restoration promise for the time after the exile and of course, the time of Christ until the time of the New Covenant until the time we ourselves are in.

Let's close in prayer. Thank you Father for a chance to look further in Your Word. Thank you for the encouragement it gives. Thank you for the ways in which we can see in Your Word the things that really relate directly to us and are genuinely practical in the best sense. If we really know what life should be about, these are truly practical books for us. Help us as we try to assimilate all the material, to do so in a way that shows real

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respect to the quality of what You have done and as we learn from it also remember it is a precious trust and we are not just to enjoy what we know, we are to use that knowledge to help others as well. We pray that for Christ's sake. Amen.

Lamentations

Lamentations is an interesting book. We have some questions about it, but it is also a book most people have not really had a chance to understand. I think if you said to the average church member, “Explain what is going on in Lamentations,” they would have a lot of trouble. I am going to try to use it as a case study in that regard and spend a little bit of extra time on it.

I. Orienting Data

A. Who wrote it?

Most people assume that it is anonymous but there is the possibility that Jeremiah wrote it. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Many laments are found in the book that bear his name and which we know he wrote. The vulgate in the Septuagint even gives Jeremiah the honor of being the author of the book, though those may be later additions. The Jewish Talmud, which is a repository of Jewish learning, does as well. You have the reference in 2 Chronicles to Jeremiah as a lamenter but there is nothing per say that says he is. However, whoever the author is, he was an eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

If you are an ancient Israelite, you are going to be used to certain things. You are going to be used to corporate laments. Those are things that we have already talked about in connection with the psalms where you have the address, the complaint, the trust, the deliverance plea, the word of assurance and the praise. A corporate lament is the crying out for help by a group, normally by the nation as a whole. Corporate laments usually are from the whole nation. Someone on behalf of the nation writes up the corporate lament, composes it, and says “We” and people readily identify it just as an individual would with an individual lament. Somebody else writes it for you but as it says what your situation is, as it expresses your emotions, it certainly talks for you. It is as if you had written it.

In the lament psalms, as we know, there are only certain types of troubles and trials and so on and you are going to say certain things in certain ways. But in the case of Lamentations, which is not just a lament but is this massive, huge, compound, complex lament, we might well expect many particular historical allusions to things that really did occur. So much that would be known only by an eyewitness is, in fact, found there. Jeremiah is in a nice position to be an eyewitness. If you know his story, if you had a chance to read the introductions to Jeremiah and just know a little bit about him, you would know he was around, he was there, he lived through the siege of Jerusalem, he was a survivor of it, and he would certainly would have had all the skills to compose this lament. However, this does not mean he is the one. Some anonymous prophet may have been called by God to produce this gem.

B. Where would it have been written?

It would have been written in Palestine presumably right after the fall of 586 BC for the for the benefit of those people who had endured it. It expresses their plea for deliverance with all the other elements that go along with that desire.

C. What is it about?

It is about the last days of Judah and Jerusalem. It is a terrible time when you think about the fact that the people had occupied this land for eight hundred or more years. Here is a city that had been captured by David four hundred or so years prior and here is the place where God had caused the temple to be built almost four hundred years prior. All of these wonderful characteristics now gone; everything gone. It is hard when everything

you are used to, everything you counted on, everything you believed in is gone. You have seen those pictures on TV of people whose houses have just burned down or an earthquake destroyed them or a storm took away everything they had. It is very, very hard. This is disorienting. The sense of loss and deprivation is very great.

1. *The Siege of Jerusalem*

I will give you some of the references and you can check them out. They are not elaborate references but are specific enough so that you can pretty well tell what it is referring to. Mentioned throughout the book is the two-year siege from 588 to 586 BC in which the population increasingly experienced the famine, the same siege we know from the Kings and Chronicles accounts. The flight of King Zedekiah is referred to. Toward the end, he and some of his military officers made a desperate attempt on ill-fed and not well-exercised horses to try to get away by night. They wanted to get down to the Jordan Valley and from there perhaps go for help somehow. They were caught and the story of what was done to them was tragic. The looting of the temple by the Babylonians is a big theme that comes up in a number of places, including the Book of Daniel. The burning of the city, the destruction of its walls, the killing off of the leadership.

2. *The Exile*

The exile is mentioned in each chapter. That, of course, is what the major punishment is. The exile of the people of Jerusalem and of Judah was a thing that represented God's era of curse. People driven off of the land that was part of who they were. Now, when it is taken away, you have no place to be. That is really hard. Of course they have a location, they are in captivity, but it is not their place, it is somebody else's.

3. *Hope for foreign help*

Then references to the hope for foreign help. There were some desperate hopes that maybe the Egyptians or somebody else would intervene.

4. *Judah betrayed by its allies*

Finally, the fact that Judah was betrayed by its allies. That, of course, is the theme of a book like Obadiah where what the Edomites did to the Israelites especially the Judeans is described pretty clearly. All those kinds of miseries were described. Why write a book that describes all those miseries? Why take the six-part lament form and put it into a giant, great big format that is the biggest lament anywhere in the Bible by far, what are you trying to say? What is the point of this? How does a book like this function in the Bible?

II. Lamentations' Function in the Bible

A. Theodicy

First of all it is a *theodicy*. That is a term that I do not think we have used before. *Theodicy* is an explanation of why what God does is right. Theodicy literally means a *God vindication*. You even have the greek *theodicy* in the word vindication the word. The idea here is that because God's ways are different from ours it is very common that we all say, "What is God doing? or is God doing anything? I can't believe God is allowing this to happen." People need theodicy all the time. Any of you who pastor or minister will have this: there will be tragic death in the community and all kinds of people will say, "Why would God allow it to happen to that nice young man? why would God allow those kids to die so young? why does God allow this?" A book like Lamentations may help you educate people about God's judgment and why He does some of the things that He does. It is not that it is going to answer every question of theodicy but the fact that we have a theodicy in Scripture is of great use.

B. God has not failed

One of its purposes is to say to people that it does make sense that all these thousands and thousands of people have been captured, decimated and deported. It does make sense. There is a reason for it all. God knows what He is doing, He is not just watching while tragedy occurs. In a tragedy people just hate what happens and they feel they are abandoned, they feel they are no longer loved, they feel they are not cared about. That is natural. It answers also the great question, what is the meaning of this horrible tragedy? It is all part of what God said He would do, it is all part of His covenant and He has not abandoned His love. He has not given up on His people. His plan is not over.

C. Need to move on

It also goes on to answer the people's own questions: What do we do now? Do we still have a relationship to God, how do we view that? What does the future hold? Where do we go from here? Is everything all over? Have we been abandoned by God so that our estate is helpless? Here are some of the other questions it also answers. Is nothing possible and have we been totally abandoned? Have the prophetic words of doom that all the prophets preached come true? If you think about it and are aware of all the evidence, it would be pretty bad if God did not destroy Jerusalem and exile the Judeans since all His prophets had said He would. It has to happen sometime if they keep predicting it. So that is important. There is also, however, a call to remain loyal after the tragedy and not to assume that God has failed.

You have got to appreciate life in the ancient world. The average Jew lived in a thoroughly polytheistic world. Everybody else believed in lots of gods and goddesses and the majority of Jews at any one time either suspected that was true or themselves believed it. From everything we know about Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and what we have in Kings and Chronicles, there was rampant idolatry polytheism going on right in the temple complex. Many Jews would have said this, "Yahweh was our national God." They would believe in many other gods and goddesses, but they would say Yahweh was the national God. "His job, His special role, was to protect our nation, keep us safe, protect us against our enemies. He might not give us crops, He might not make me healthy, He might not do personal or societal things for us, but His job was political, He was to protect us. He was supposed to get really riled up and fight like crazy if any other nation attacked us but He didn't. Therefore, is it not reasonable to conclude either that He is a pretty minor god or that maybe there is no point in believing in Him at all anymore? He is a loser god."

The Babylonian's literature said very openly, "The god Marduk," that was the Babylonian chief god, "has defeated all other gods." That was their belief. They believed that in heaven Marduk had asserted his supremacy and had become the chief god of all heaven and now all other gods were inferior to him. They believed he had made real progress and become a heavy-duty guy and that all other gods had declined by comparison. It made perfect sense to them that Marduk was the winner and that this god Yahweh or whatever his name is, was not much. That is the way they thought and many Jews joined them in thinking that. It just seemed obvious. "Hey, if your nation loses big, everything is gone, you're totally absorbed into somebody else's empire, what are you going to say about your national god?" "Well, he's not much."

Lamentations helped people understand that God has not failed; He has accomplished what He set out to accomplish. His purposes have been met. It is also important to appreciate that sin has an awful fate, punishment for sin is always deserved, grace and salvation are never deserved. It is a very interesting thing. I do not know if you have ever heard it expressed that way, but if you think about what the Scripture teaches us, punishment from God is always deserved, God's grace is never deserved. You earn the bad, you never earn the good. That is the fantastic contrast between punishment and grace. People now need to accept the fact that the seventy years of exile have begun. We will talk about that seventy-year factor that we have also alluded to earlier. People need to move on now.

1. From Israel to Judaism

They need to move on from Israel to Judaism. You can speak of Israelites or Judeans prior to 586 BC but afterwards you speak about them only historically. The people who exist after 586 BC are called Jews, so the term Jews comes into play. Now in modern times there is also the term Israelis. People confuse these and use them interchangeably even though it is not correct. The term Judean or Israelite refer to the time before 586, the time before the fall of the city. After that the term Jew may be used at any time until present-day times because you do not even refer to a Jew as a Judean and that means the citizen of a certain nation and that nation does not exist. And after 1947 the term Israeli is also used. Many people get confused and talk about the Israelis in the Old Testament and that is just nonsense. Be careful, the terminology is Israelite in the early period, modern-day Israeli, and Jew in between. Just a chronology clarification so that when you are reading, you realize what you are reading, what people are talking about, which time period they are referring to. That is a need, to move on from Israel to Judaism.

2. From Old Covenant confidence to New Covenant Hope

Also from the Old Covenant confidence that people often had that now is gone because the Old Covenant cannot save them anymore, it condemned them, to a New Covenant hope. There must be now a hope for something special and different not just going back to the old way that leads to destruction but something new.

3. From corporate to individual responsibility

Finally, from the corporate mentality that we are a nation, we have an economy, and we have a king named Zedekiah to individual responsibility. This shift is very powerful. One sees it in several key places in the Book of Ezekiel and so on. Part of it comes out implicitly in Lamentations. People have to now realize that there is not a nation of Israel to be judged anymore, there is a people Israel, but the responsibility for the endurance of that people is partly placed on every individual. You have more and more individual responsibility to please God and to keep His law rather than a sense of corporate responsibility. Both are still around but there certainly is a transition from one emphasis to another.

D. How does God accomplish it

How does God inspiring this writer, whether it be Jeremiah or someone else, to accomplish what he accomplishes? There is a lot of realism and I list examples:

Death, cannibalism, famine, disease and slaughter. There is also the anguish, a great deal of anguish. This is a hard, hard time and the inspired writer is careful to portray that. There is true grief. Grief is when you are sorry for what you have lost and it hurts. Much of that is expressed. Of course, as in any lament, it is a prayer. Everything is being brought before God by a people who are in grief. If you want some parallels, look at Psalms 44, 74, 79, and 80. Corporate laments are often historical. Personal laments tend to be very stereotyped, the corporate laments will be somewhat stereotyped but will also tend to have actual historical references in them. They are about something and you can tell what it is very, very often.

III. Structure of Lamentations

A. Acrostic

Part of the form is acrostic. What is acrostic? It is doing things alphabetically, going through the alphabet on any particular subject or topic, and this is employed to heighten the lament. If you say, "A it is awful; B it is bad; C it is crummy; D it is a disaster; E it is egregiously painful; F and so on." There is a sense in which that enumeration both gives an opportunity to say how bad it is in every conceivable vocabulary way you can, but at the same time going through the process is also to some degree what is called cathartic. People say, "Talk about it; let it out."

Not in every case. You have got to do that kind of thing carefully. You do not want to sit next to a person on the bus and say, "You know, I am tempted to strangle people." You just have to be more careful who you tell, under what conditions and so on. You do not pour out your soul to total strangers, but there is great merit in talking through a problem and describing all of its characteristic. Acrostic poems do tend to help one do that, if it is a problem and if that is what the issue is. This book is acrostic in an interesting way. Chapter 1 has, of course, 22 verses because that happens to be the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It has three poetic couplets in each verse, each of those poetic couplets is telling the story but only the first of each three begins with a given letter.

So you have the equivalent of Hebrew *A* starting the first of three couplets in verse 1, then the equivalent of the letter *B*, the first of the three couplets in verse 2 and so on. Chapter 2 is likewise, but chapter 3 is triply acrostic; *AAA, BBB, CCC, DDD*, like that. So you get the impression, wow this has built to something and it has. That is very purposely what is going on in the way that the book is organized. It then continues on so that you have in chapter 4 two couplets per verse. That is, of course, a diminution. In chapter 4 only the first of each group of two begins with the acrostic pattern. Chapter 5 is fascinating because it has 22 verse but it is no longer alphabetical at all. When you see it in the Hebrew suddenly you say, "I see what is happening here. It starts off level, it goes way up with a kind of a climatic or crescendo description of the misery, tails off until it kind of fades out with a whimper at the end of chapter 5 and that really is the way it works. If you study the vocabulary, if you study the Hebrew style, all of that fits so that it works that way.

Why that format? First, the enumeration that I talked about, the controlled grief. But also, what is a tragedy? A tragedy is something that starts out a certain way and ends up worse. A tragedy is a downhill thing where the end is worse than the beginning. Even the Hebrew structure conveys that. But that is, believe it or not, very much the way it works in a Shakespeare play; very much that same kind of format. You follow it and you will see that the climatic stuff usually takes place right in Act 3, by the time you get to Act 5 it is short and sometimes those plays end in what seems like a kind of dull, boring way. You wonder, "Boy, that kind of just fades off." If you watch a Shakespeare play that can sometimes be the case. You say, "What kind of an ending was that?" It is all kind of a way of thinking that many people appreciated for many years; it is a classical way of doing it.

B. Chiastic

In addition, there is a chiastic structure. We have mentioned the term *chiastic* before. This is the kind of structure that is concentric. The first and the last elements tend to be the same; the next to the first and the next to the last tend to correspond in some special way; then the next and the next and so on until you get to the middle, whatever it is. In this case it turns out that chapters 1 and 5 are summary depictions of the disaster, chapters 2 and 4 are more explicit, focused with detail on the grimmest, chapter 3 highly intense in subject matter but also, right smack dab in chapter 3, is the wonderful stuff that people know from Lamentations but do not realize it is from Lamentations. You are right in the middle of all this suffering, "I have been deprived, my splendor is gone, my affliction. I remember them all. My soul is downcast within me." I am reading up to verse 21 in chapter 3, and then all of a sudden this comes, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness," that is what you suddenly get.

If you are following the Hebrew structure, you can see the book in even greater richness. If you are looking for all it hinges on, it actually hinges on the mercy of God. Has God become unmerciful? No. Has this tragedy for all of its sorrow and grief somehow thwarted the great and wonderful loving plan of redemption? No, not at all, and God's mercies are ever new. People who turn to Him always have hope. There is never a point where you can say, "Well, in as much as things have gone this way, I see no hope." You can say it but it is not true. In the Lord, there is always hope whether you are in a jail cell, a death bed, you are drowning like Jonah or anybody else, whether everything seems lost, whether those people you love are lost, at least for the time being, there is always hope.

It is very nice to see the acrostic structure, the chiasmic structure, the language, and the imagery within the form. I hope that helps you see that there is this layer upon layer in this book and it is part of the way that someone with God's ability to put books together can do it. Yet most Christians see none of that and part of your challenge will be to help them see it. As you preach and teach it, try to help convey some of the same data that we have talked about now.

IV. How would you use this book?

How could you use this book? Certainly, you are going to use it like any corporate lament. It is going to be a prayer for deliverance. It is going to teach people to learn to trust and be assured. It is going to give comfort. The psalms that one has in the lament form are not there to make you feel bad, they are there to help you trust in God because they have the address, the trust, the assurance, and the praise elements. They are not all complaint. They are not all deliverance pleas. They are also praise and glorification of God, acceptance of His will. That is not the same as fatalism.

To mourn the destruction of the temple because there is no temple is a historical reminder of the plan of God still used in Judaism. So you have this used even though there was a second temple; it got destroyed too. So Lamentations is seen in Judaism as nicely covering for the fact that the temple, twice now, has been destroyed. It also is part of the New Covenant's background that the second temple does get built but it is not buildings that you can trust in. The seventy years of exile do come to an end. They come to an end when people have faith in their own personal lives in Christ. Jerusalem is restored, the Messiah does go there, but the heavenly Jerusalem is to come and God did not abandon His people. He had a better thing for them; His Son would come and then the very glory of God that is only reflected in the temple and in the city of Jerusalem where His name dwells now is, as John says, "Right among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father." God has a better plan with regard to all of the things that Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple represented. That is a long time.

I hope it helped all of us to pay attention to the fact that there is a huge turning point now in history; With the destruction of Jerusalem comes a whole different thing. The prophets we are going to talk about all are now reflective in one way or another and a whole other part of this vast and dramatic change is in the direction of God's plan for His people, the immediate direction, not the overall. One of the important things that we have mentioned very briefly is this: We now start to deal with quite a number of books that have a date specified for the time that the prophet received the prophecy. That is not done with other books. Before this general exile period you do not get that.

But suddenly now you get prophecies dated. Haggai dates every one of his prophecies. Zechariah dates all his early ones. Ezekiel dates a great many of his, not every single one, but a great many throughout the book. (I have failed in this list to list Daniel because Daniel has some that are dated.)

What is the reason for what I call *the countdown*? Why such an emphasis on dating prophecies? What is the point? The answer is what Jeremiah predicted twice in Jeremiah 25 and once in Jeremiah 29, that there would be a period of seventy years for Babylon. How does that work? How is this period of seventy years for Babylon to be understood? Not every scholar agrees on this. I am going to give you what I think is most likely, but you will find people who do not agree with this viewpoint. Some scholars have said Jeremiah must have meant that the exile would last a lifetime—seventy years, a lifetime. In Psalm 90 you have it described that a typical lifetime is seventy years or so. Others have said that he means seventy years for the king of Babylon. So we start the seventy years from some point and go to some point but you have got to link it closely to Babylonian history.

I do not think that is really likely. I think most likely is to understand this—that what God has told Jeremiah really is specifically and exactly a seventy-year period and that that seventy years begins with the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. That is the decisive moment. It is one thing for there to have been an exile earlier and even

a couple of small token exiles earlier than that. It is one thing for the people to be gone off of the land but it is a big deal for God's presence to be taken away as Ezekiel sees it happen in Ezekiel 10. It is very significant when God says, "I'm out of here. I'm leaving," as He says in the Book of Ezekiel. What the prophets are seeing and saying is very simple, and if you start counting down the seventy years predicted by Jeremiah starting at 586 you are going to end up at 516.

During the exile everybody was kind of watching the clock. They were watching and saying, "This exile starts really with God abandoning us by letting His temple be destroyed and so on, therefore, when will it end?" It will end after seventy years but it is not just that the time is up; obviously it ends with the rebuilding of the temple. So they are thinking, we have only got seventy years until that new temple has to come about somehow and this really does begin to govern their thinking. So that produces a lot of what Ezekiel talks about, and very specifically much of what Haggai and Zechariah talk about. This seventy-year prophecy, I would suggest to you, is not just a kind of general number. Some people have thought it was to be measured maybe from the exile of Jehoiachin in 598 BC down to the finalization of the return of the Jews in 538, but that is really sixty not seventy. There are all kinds of ways of thinking about it. I believe it really is the duration of the destruction of the temple. That is really the point.

Ezekiel

I. Orienting Data

Let me then start talking about Ezekiel and what we have in the Book of Ezekiel.

A. Overview

It is a big book, forty-eight chapters; it is one of the Major Prophets. I am going to summarize it in a relatively greater speed than how carefully we looked at Lamentations.

1. *Fall of Jerusalem*

The first thing I would say is that Ezekiel has a special emphasis here on the fall of Jerusalem. Indeed, what Ezekiel does is devote half the book, as we measure it by chapters, to hammering away at basically one message. If you look at chapters 1 through 24 you will see, for the most part, that they have a single theme expressed in many, many beautifully varied ways, which is this: do not fool yourselves, the exile will not be short and it will not be partial.

Ezekiel went into exile in 598 BC when King Jehoiachin was exiled. Jehoiachin was the last legitimate king of the Judeans and he was deposed and taken into captivity to Babylon in 598 BC after just reigning for a few months. He was the king featured in the tablet inscribed with the food distribution lists that confirms the ending of the Book of 2 Kings. After him the Babylonians put a puppet king named Zedekiah on the throne. Zedekiah was really the Babylonian choice for king, but he was also a descendent of David. He is the one who is deposed of in 586. Many people hoped that the exile would be brief. Jeremiah encountered a prophet named Hananiah and descriptions are given in chapter 37 about how he had to deal with this prophet who was saying, "Two years and then the exile will be over. The Babylonians will be off the scene. Give it two years." Jeremiah said, "No, it is going to seventy." That was hard. Hananiah saying was, "Oh, it will just be 598 to 596. Jeremiah says, "No, it hasn't even come yet. When it comes it will last seventy years." Therefore, people like Ezekiel are up against the same kind of opposition that Jeremiah was up against. People said, "Come on, not for a whole lifetime, you don't mean that." So, they are all giving positive words and saying it cannot be that bad and Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, has to preach a very, very unpopular message and has to say, "Look, here is the situation; it's going to be bad, bad, bad."

2. *Oracle Against Foreign Nations*

Also he has oracles against foreign nations as you might expect by now, especially Egypt, Tyre and a new one, Magog, a nation that does not really exist, a nation that seems to be kind of a composite that speaks about all the nations gathering against God's people.

3. *New Jerusalem and New Temple*

Then he has visions of the New Jerusalem and the new temple.

A. Author

He was a priest. His prophecies go from 593 to 571.

B. Emphases

1. God's judgment

2. The idea of the presence of the Lord in His glory leaving and then returning in his visions
3. The idolatry that is all over the place in the final days of Jerusalem and how that confirms that God's people are not faithful
4. God's omnipresence and omniscience
5. Destruction of final world powers
6. Total final victory of God
7. Ezekiel is very helpful in showing how different the age of the New Covenant will be from that of the Old. When you read Ezekiel he describes the future for the nation of Israel and it does not look anything like actual ancient Israel. Nothing like it; geographically it is totally different. He describes Jerusalem; it is nothing like the actual historical Jerusalem. He describes the new temple; it is nothing like the actual historical temple. What he is saying is this: in the age to come there are going to be realities that are totally different than what we are used to. It is not the same. It is not just that we will come back and start up life as it once was. No, what God has in mind after the exile is something much, much better. Much bigger, much different; not the same old thing. I think you can see it in Ezekiel even better, more clearly than you can in most prophets, and it helps you to understand what the prophets are really doing; that they are saying the restoration era is an era of vastly different blessing on a vastly different scale.

II. Themes

A. Major Themes

1. Give up your false hope.

There are people who you will encounter all your life in ministry who have false hope. They will have the notion, for example, that if they raise their children correctly their children will be good all through their teenage years, college years, and thereafter and will reflect their values and be nice, quiet, obedient kids and never have a problem. There are people who believe that and it hurts then if that is their confidence, if that is what they really believe God owes them to have that not work out. You will have people who will say, "If your relationship to Christ is good, you just are not going to get sick; you should not have to be sick." Many people hold onto that. It makes sense to them, it fits somehow into their psyche and they are expecting that they are not going to get sick if they know Christ. So they just cannot understand it if they get sick; it just does not make sense. There are even groups, as some of you probably know, where people will say, "Haven't been sick a day in my life, had some symptoms but never really been sick." They talk about having symptoms. Professor Fea who taught here for a long time wrote an article called *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel* and in it tried to demonstrate how wrong that way of thinking is. I could go on and list many kinds of false hopes.

There are many people who are convinced that Christ is supposed to make their life smooth, that everything should go well. Often Christian testimonies are this way. Someone stands up in some kind of a church meeting and says, "I was a prominent rascal before I accepted Christ. Now everything is going just great." The implication of that kind of mentality follows that, if everything is not going great for you, you must not be much of a Christian. People need to know that often the proof that you are in God's will is that you are suffering as He predicts. That is what Paul says. Paul says, "What proof do you want that I am an apostle? Christ came to suffer and did, He is a suffering servant. I am suffering for Him, let me describe my suffering. What more proof do you need?" He gives his suffering as the credential that makes him a true apostle. That is just a way of thinking that many people do not have in mind, and Ezekiel is really useful for teaching that.

2. Ezekiel is also an advisor to the community

People come to him and ask about this and that, and he says, "I don't know, I'll go ask the Lord." He goes and prays and God frequently gives him answers and he comes back and says, "Here is what God told me."

3. Interrelationship of leader and people

He addresses the interrelationship of leader and people in his foreign nation oracles. Unlike some of the other books, Ezekiel will talk about the Pharaoh more than about Egypt per say, more about the king of Tyre than about Tyre per say, etc. That is one of his special characteristics. You see in Ezekiel the significance of the government leadership. It is one of his very useful themes.

4. Universal divine sovereignty

Ezekiel starts with a vision that involves the picture of the wheel in a wheel and so on. This really is not mysterious. This is not something that cannot be comprehended. He says in Ezekiel 1:4, "I saw a windstorm coming out of the north flashing light, brilliant light, the center of the fire looked like glowing metal, then there is four living creatures, each of them has four kinds of things and they have got wings and they all face in different directions, each one goes straight ahead and don't move as they turn." What can this be? You go on and see the whole thing and you might say, "What kind of a weird thing is this?" Some people have even tried to argue it is obviously a flying saucer. What Ezekiel sees is God's super fast worldwide chariot. This is a bird's eye view. He sees this chariot that has the wheels all around; it has wheels in a wheel, not like hubs or something, but rather wheels on different axes so that the wheels do not need to turn. There is a wheel facing this way and a wheel facing that way, like a gyroscope would look. It has got living creatures pulling this, facing in every direction so they do not need to turn this chariot around. This rather can just go.

He says at the end of chapter 1, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." That is what God caused him to see. In effect, God suddenly shows up and says, "Hi Ezekiel, here you are way over here near the Tigris River and I'm just dropping by. How do you like My chariot? Nice, huh? It's fast. Ezekiel, I want you to preach and just tell people that I'm sovereign over the whole universe. I'm not localized back in Judah like many, many people think. I'm the only God and I'm universal; I'm over it all and I'm commissioning you to preach My word to a bunch of people that will be hard hearted, stiff necked, and resist everything you say but that's your commission. So long," and off He goes. I know that is a caricature but that is the idea of what is going on in Ezekiel. In exile these people are not way off from Yahweh's influence and control. There is no place where he does not have any influence or control. That does not happen; it does not work that way.

5. The need to have hope in an otherwise hopeless situation comes partly from that divine sovereignty.

6. Individual and national responsibility; he does not drop that as a concept.

7. Unification as a prelude to eschatological fulfillment.

He talks about the fact that Israel and Judah together, all of God's people must be unified. The unity of God's people is a great theme in Scripture.

8. Corporate leadership of the Holy Spirit is a big theme for him.

9. The certainty of fulfillment of God's word

It will happen so do not have false hope. If God says He is going to punish, He is going to punish. You cannot naively figure that something will not happen if God has said it will.

10. The transformation of people prior to eschatological fulfillment is important

Ezekiel wants everybody to understand that they need to become a new people. You do not say, "Make me Lord. Force me to be part of your New Covenant." No, there has to be a will to get into that. It just does not automatically happen.

11. Transformation of the temple

12. Transformation of the Promised Land

13. The presence of God.

If God is not present than we are in trouble. If He is present and we are sinful then we are in trouble too. You have the beneficent limited presence of God that reflects itself in Ezekiel.

B. Highlights

1. In the first half of this bifid book, this two-part book, Jerusalem must fall. That is woe.
2. Then come the more positive stuff. The oracles against foreign nations are positive from the point of view of God's people because they all say these oppressor nations must decline and God's people must rise.
3. Hope after the fall.
4. The great visions of the future; nothing like the present.

C. Other Issues in Ezekiel

1. Ezekiel reflects the sense of the turning of history which is what the exile period is.
2. Ezekiel is apocalyptic, but I am going to talk about more apocalyptic when we get to Daniel. However, Ezekiel still has plenty of examples of it.
3. Ezekiel has plenty examples of the lament form. He is a lamenter, but it is not the lament form as we have it in the Psalms. It is another kind of lament which is more like the funerary lament where you are imagining what you say at the death of somebody. You are imagining the funeral of someone who is now in a very sad position. He does that in a lot of his foreign nation oracles.
4. The dated prophecies, as we have already said.
5. When you read the Prophets, it can seem like they are talking materialistically, just as it can seem in the New Testament when you read about streets of gold in Jerusalem. That is a misunderstanding. When you read about the supposedly material restoration in Ezekiel, it is more like that they will get their land back but not the same land. They will get your city back but not the same city. They will get their temple back but not the same temple. Everything changes. What he is really saying is, "We prophets do give our predictions in what sound like material terms. But, if you really examine what we are doing, we are using that as a means of conveying the fact that there is something ahead that we don't even understand. It is beyond, it is great. You don't understand it; we don't understand it. It is something fabulous in the plan of God. We can only describe it from the point of view of the material but that is not really what we are thinking." If you understand, you can see it so well in Ezekiel 40-48. It will be like a prism through which you can also then suddenly understand what Amos means, for example, when he says, "The days are coming when the person trying to plant his field will tell the person who is still harvesting, would you please get out of the way, I need to plant the crops," because the harvest will be so abundant that they will go right around to planting time again. That is just crazy in any agricultural society; you do not have harvests like that. It is a way of using

material terminology to say that there is something great and wonderful ahead that we do not have any ability to portray as well as we would like to.

Daniel, Esther, and Isaiah

I. Overview of Daniel

Here is an overview look at the way Daniel is structured. It is really very visibly bifid. You have six chapters of stories about Daniel and then six chapters of apocalyptic prophecy. I am going to talk about apocalyptic very shortly and what its basic characteristics are. You have the various stories. If you have ever read through the book, you know about all the ways in which there are challenges and dangers for Daniel or opportunities for him to interpret dreams that help you appreciate the nature of what is coming. All the themes of those are that the world empires must eventually give way to God's empire.

Then with chapter 7 you start in the apocalyptic visionary material. You notice that there are three chapters that are each individual visions, 7, 8, and 9, and then a big, single three-chapter vision in 10-12, so the second half also kind of divides. It is all very neatly structured. Daniel may not have had these things happen in the order that they are given. They have been ordered more thematically and structurally than chronologically perhaps, but we do not know that for sure. Although, there appears to be a general, chronological order from earliest to latest in the first half, so that could be also true in the second as well.

The point of all of these visions is that whatever is happening now, whatever is going on with all these great nations and these superpowers of Daniel's day, it will not last. It may take centuries, it may go from one nation to another, but in the final analysis there will be a special new kingdom, the kingdom of the Messiah, that is going to finally rule. It is going to eliminate all earthly kingdoms and it is going to last forever and ever. That is the great message of the Book of Daniel.

The sub themes of the first section are stories about faith under oppression, trusting in God during times that are hard, and continuing to pray. The big theme even of the first part of the book is, "Look, if you are God's people, you don't have to worry about the nation you are under. It can be a good nation, it can be crummy nation, you can be in times of relative freedom or times of horrible oppression; you know where things are headed. You trust in God and all will come right." That is really what both parts of the book are emphasizing.

II. Orienting Data for Daniel

A. Style factor

First the style factor. Certain critical scholars have said, "These stories in the Book of Daniel are obviously folk stories. They aren't historical." That is a huge mistake. How you tell a story can vary enormously. You can tell a story that is perfectly true in a comic book format. Comic book strips are usually the kind of thing that are fictitious, but they do not need to be. Likewise, you can take pure nonsense and make it look historical. We could make up a story of how Hillary Clinton landed here in a flying saucer and came into class and pulled off her face mask and turned out to be an alien from the Andromeda Galaxy and was here to destroy the world and we overpowered her and saved the world. Pure nonsense, but we could do it in the form of a scholarly journal article with sections and headings and a huge bibliographical reference and excellent footnotes. The style of how you write something does not say whether it is historical or not. Do not ever be fooled by that.

Because Daniel is reflecting life under the foreign regime and in that foreign regime, it has the biggest Aramaic section in the Bible. Aramaic was the language most people were speaking. They were all from different linguistic groups and Aramaic was the lingua franca of the day.

B. Dating

1. There are some great doubts about the dating of Daniel.
2. The traditional date is that Daniel was written sometime around and about events that take place in the sixth-century BC. That is what it purports to be, as seen in the following:
 - a. The quality of the Aramaic.
 - b. The presence already at Qumran of fragments of the Book of Daniel.
 - c. Its immediate acceptance already in the Maccabean period when others think it was composed suddenly.
 - d. The knowledge of certain key details that are represented and probably were lost and again confirmed only by archeological excavation.
 - e. The tricky issues of Belshazzar's co-regency again, not known anywhere in the ancient world as far as we know.
 - f. Lots of other kinds of details, etc.

C. Authorship

1. However, other people have said, "No, this book was made up in the Maccabean period." That is a period in the second-century BC starting around 180-175 when the Jews were trying to revolt against the terrible oppressors called the Seleucids, a particular Greek empire.
2. Otherwise, the author would be Daniel himself because that is what the book seems to be and there is widespread agreement that a single person wrote all of this. So either somebody made it up in this Maccabean period and projected it back in time or that it really comes from that time.

III. Apocalyptic as a Category

I do want to address the characteristics of apocalyptic because it applies to both Daniel and some of Isaiah. It applies to Ezekiel, Daniel, parts of Isaiah, Joel and Zachariah. There are five Old Testament books that have a lot of apocalyptic in them. *Apocalyptic* is a type of literature that emphasizes that somebody has revealed to him how everything is going to turn out. It is the revelation of, the uncovering of, history from this point to the end. That is what apocalyptic means. Apocalypse means an uncovered thing. You can also say it is a revelation, a revealed thing.

A. Visionary

First of all, apocalyptic is visionary. It has lots of visions in it. Just as you would expect in the second half of Daniel, the apocalyptic part, which is loaded with visions.

B. Great sweep of history

Secondly, it deals with the great sweep of history. Apocalyptic literature is saying, "Let me tell you how history goes from now to the very end."

C. Numerical coding

It tells you through a lot of numerical coding. It is very common to get seventy of this and three and a half of that and four hundred and ninety of these and so on. Part of the reason is to say, "Look, God has decided how history is going to unfold. He has it all figured out. By way of these symbolic numbers we also give you the impression that if you really knew what these numbers meant, you yourself could add it up." The question is, does

the numbers really have enough information to tell you that? People have always tried to crack the codes but not always with much success. Some have argued, "No, the numbers are too hidden. They are just ways of saying God has it all numbered and that is what we are to understand."

D. Symbols

There are also a lot of symbols.

E. Images

You have statues, you have images, and you have things that people see.

F. Encouragement

These statues and images and visions and so on of figures and events, they all give you a feel, they are all devices for giving you an understanding of what history is going to do, what is going to happen.

This gives encouragement. How does it give encouragement? It is not easy to be in a situation that is rotten because you are a believer. Many people live in those situations today with their faith crushed and living in oppression. A lot of the world just looks at the freedom we have to be religious in any way we want and is amazed by it. That is not their experience; they have never known that. So if you know that what you believe is true and that God is unveiling how it will all come to fruition so that your faith is rightly placed, that is very encouraging. If you know that the nations now oppressing you will one day be eliminated, that is very encouraging. So it does encourage you in hard times.

G. Prophet-angel / prophet-God dialogue

There is often a prophet-angel dialogue or a prophet-God dialogue because what happens is a progressive unveiling in apocalyptic literature. The prophet sees something, a scene God lets him see, a vision or whatever, and he says, "What does this mean?" and it gets explained. You will see that question and answer format all over the place in these kinds of books.

H. Hidden truth is revealed

It is true; it is just that it was not generally known. You get in on it if you are the prophet and your job is to convey it to others. This gives certainty for the elect. If they know they are going to win, it is nice; it is good to have that encouragement. That is important to know that if you are God's chosen people based on your faith in him, then there is no doubt about the outcome. I list four of the major Old Testament books because Joel has the fewest of these characteristics and then the Book of Revelation which is loaded with them. The apocalyptic can be in one part or the other. Daniel is a bifid book, in Daniel the apocalyptic comes at the end. Zachariah is a bifid book, in Zachariah the apocalyptic comes at the beginning. There is no special thing in the way it has to be located, just be aware that it can be in either place.

IV. Overview of Esther

Esther is a book that gets misunderstood a lot.

A. Content

It tends to get interpreted *exemplaristicly*. What do we mean by that? What tends to happen is that people say, "I want to see what Esther had and I want some of that." Many women have Bible studies and they want to be more like Esther. The problem is that Esther is a mix of good and not so good. God is using her the same way

He uses many characters in the Bible who are not consistently exemplary. He uses them for His purposes. You have to watch that and not just say, "Well, if Esther did it, it must be good."

1. It is a story about how Jews escaped an extermination during the Persian Empire; a war of extermination that is planned against them. This is during the time of a king named Xerxes who, as far as we know, reigned about 486 to 463, 464 or so BC.

2. Esther is a Jewish woman who became a queen and, with the help of her cousin/stepfather (he is her cousin but he adopted her), helps preserve the Jews. That sounds great and is great; it is a wonderful thing and a blessing of God.

B. Author

1. Probably written by some fifth-century Jew.

2. Prominent in the civil service because of his vast ability to quote from the Persian records. There were a number of Jews in the civil service; Daniel was the most prominent. Remember that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniels associates, are as well. So this tradition was there.

C. Date

1. Most of it takes place during a single year, so probably near the end around 470 or 465.

2. It could have been written down later; that is always possible especially because of its connections with the feast of Purim.

D. Emphasis

1. How Jewish people and Jewish identities survive in a hostile culture.

2. The importance of remembering that God was merciful to a whole group of people. It is very easy to say however, "Oh good, the Book of Esther represents a wonderful story of faithful people trusting in a reliable God." Esther is in a tradition of several Biblical characters who have a kind of a up-and-down story to their life. There are a lot of Biblical characters like this. A number of characters, out of the dozens whose stories we know quite a bit about, have this kind of situation. They are in a position of honor of some kind that is challenged and then vindicated and even enhanced.

V. Themes and Issues in Esther

A. Those who did not return to Judah

More important, what kinds of questions is Esther answering? One of the questions is this: What about the Jews who did not go back with people like Zerubbabel and Jeshua, who did not answer the call of God as it is made in Isaiah, but who stayed, who accommodated, who fit into the Persian Empire? There were many who did. Esther tells you that side of the story. Focus back to Judah as people return from the exile and go back to Judah and rebuild the temple and so on. Most of the rest of the Bible is going to focus on that. Esther is special in that it focuses the secularized or paganized Jews. God's call was to go back to Judah; go back, live there, rebuild, build the temple, worship there again and so on. That is the official call. Thousands did follow, but Esther tells you about those who did not.

B. Would God further punish His people?

It also answers the question, would God further punish His people? You have the exile and all of that. Is He going to do something beyond that? The answer is, no He is not. He will not let that happen because their punishment was plenty.

C. Accommodating pagan ways

It also describes accommodationism. These are Judeans, these are not Jews, you have to be very careful. Esther is less than ethical about many things. For example, she gets to be queen by trying out as one of the one-night stands of the king. What King Xerxes did was to have a new woman come in every night to his bedroom and if he liked her he might keep her around for awhile, if he did not he would send her off to be a palace worker; she would be one of the servants in the palace. Esther is very eager to please the king so she asks, "What can I do? What's the tricks? What does he like?" The harem keepers are only too happy to help her because that makes them look good. She pleases the king very much and eventually gets to be queen through a series of circumstances that the storyline describes for you pretty well. But, this is not some specially godly desire on her part; to be a Persian queen, married to a non-Jew, administrating things, yet God does use her in a good way.

D. No mention of God

Interestingly, the book does not even mention God. No mention of Yahweh, no mention of Elohim, or any of the other names for God. That is usually purposeful. When you get that kind of thing in a narrative anywhere, it is usually because you are in a secular setting and the people there are nonbelievers. It is a part of style that Moses used already back in Genesis. If you do not have any mention of any name of God, you also are implicitly being told that this was a secular context. These are Jews ethically now, but not religiously. That is important.

E. Not cited in New Testament

Esther is not cited in the New Testament, not because it is not a legitimate book but because it is not a book that tells you about how to have faith, it is a book that shows you God's faithfulness in not further punishing His people but protecting them. Thus, the danger is exemplarism. You will say, "Oh well, I'm going to copy what is going on in Esther," and that is not really what is going on.

F. Laws of the Medes and Persians

It also does demonstrate how you can get around the laws of the Medes and Persians. The Medes and Persians had this system that said law should be about people and you should not allow a king to change the law, otherwise, they will do whatever they want. So, laws once made could not be broken. But what Esther shows in the story is the fact that you can always figure out a counter law and pass that. In the story of Esther a character named Haman gets the king to believe that a good thing to do would be proclaim quietly and secretly that everybody throughout the Persian Empire had a legal right at a certain time to attack the Jews. How are you going to handle that? Once the king makes such a proclamation what is he going to do? He can make another proclamation privately and secretly that the Jews are ordered to be prepared for this, to know about it in advance, and to defend themselves. So when their anti-Semite neighbors come to kill them, the Jews are ready and waiting and they learn who their enemies are and they defend against them and it is total turning of the tables.

It provides freedom and stability for Jews because they eliminate their enemies. That is not a real peachy Christian message as you can guess, but it is a way of showing that God retains an interest in those people that He had already punished and His fairness will not allow them to be punished further.

After Esther, the story is going to focus back on Judah and on the Jews who really did believe that the faith direction is the direction of return to Judah and rebuilding and reestablishment of the covenant and of the sacrifices and the temple and so no. I think Esther is a very useful book; it helps you appreciate God's actions, His

steadiness, and His reliability. You just have to be awfully careful not to get a lot of religious guidance from Esther in that easy way you can get it from many other books. Statements made by people in other books will be right on target. You just have to be always much more cautious to realize that Esther and Mordecai are much more secularized; they are accommodationist Jews. If you see that it will still help you appreciate what is going on in the book.

VI. Second Part of Isaiah

Our last look is at the second part of Isaiah. Many of you know that in some circles this second part of Isaiah would simply be called 2 Isaiah. By that terminology people would mean a second author or group of authors writing long after the prophet who wrote the material in chapters 1-33. The person who wrote 1-33, of course, was prophesying in the late eighth-century BC. This prophet was prophesying during the middle of the sixth-century BC so he is one hundred and eighty years later or so. That is only one view so I am certainly not going to use that terminology. I am going to say instead that we do have another bifid book. We have the Book of Isaiah organized with the material that relates directly to that early period, the eighth-century BC in one half, and then a nice dividing chunk, as we talked about before in the biographical material that involves Isaiah, taken from 2 Kings. Then we have the chunk that reflects what he preached about the exile and the period after the exile. Isaiah covered a lot of territory, a huge book, all these different time foci and it is grouped by foci—by what it focuses on.

A. Message

1. Hope during and after the exile. If you use that terminology of woe and weal which has been popular to use among scholars, this is the weal portion of much of the book.
2. It really picks up with chapter 40; 36-39 is the biographical part from 2 Kings and then 40 comes. 40-48 have the big theme of deliverance out of captivity. The exile is coming to an end, get out, and go back to Judah.
3. Chapters 49-55: the Messiah. It focuses on God's Messiah and His redemption. How He pays the price so we can be right with God again.
4. Then 56-66 have great emphasis on Zion as the home of the redeemed.

B. Zionism

Out of this comes a term that is sometimes used, *Zionism*. Today Zionism often refers to modern Jews in the modern world feeling the call to become citizens of Israel. Actually, if you are a Jew, migrate to Israel, live and help out that in country, then you are the modern definition of Zionism. *Biblical Zionism* is just a way of talking about this strong emphasis on the Jews who settled in as Jeremiah had told them; buy houses, live there; plant fields, grow fields; get married. You have got to remember it is going to be a whole seventy-year exile. Many had taken that so seriously and done it so well that they were right at home. When the Persians took over from the Babylonians, they were fairly nice emperors. It was not a bad empire. Many people could say, "You know, we are doing quite well. Yes we are not independent, and yes the Persians are the ones finally and ultimately in control but gee, the roads are good, the mail is good." The Persians had an actual pony express system; an excellent mail system. There was a lot of prosperity for many Jews. They were hardworking and industrious and they did well. If you have a nice house and good farmlands somewhere in Mesopotamia, and your children have grown up there, they speak Aramaic, and they have friends, it is not going to be easy to go back to little Judah which is poor, empty, and the city is in ruins. Jerusalem was in ruins for a hundred years later. When Nehemiah comes back, the whole city is still in ruins. There is not much to go back to. It is going to be hard; you are going to have to try to build up a livelihood, all those years you have put into your fields in Mesopotamia are gone, you have got to sell those and go back. Not a lot of people wanted to do that.

So Isaiah is inspired by God just to hammer away and say, “You belong back in Judah. You belong back so you can worship at Mount Zion. That is where I want you to go; that is the focal point.” It is answering the question—what do you do now that the exile is over? It is clear what Isaiah says, “You are delivered from captivity, the Messiah is going to redeem you for all time, not just now. For now your call by God is to return home.” Can there be hope for those whom God had so severely punished? Yes, it is a glorious hope and a wonderful future. That is what Isaiah is doing. A lot of positive, warm, encouraging, glorious, and grand themes in the book.

C. Reverse of the exile / reverse of the curse

What is the expectation? The expectation is the reverse of the exile. When Isaiah originally predicted it in 720 BC, they did not even have an exile yet. They had had during part of his lifetime the exile of the north that occurred but not the exile of the south. So he is predicting that all of these things will eventually take place. The reverse of the curse. Also, he specifically talks about the Persians and about King Cyrus. It requires great faith though when he says it because it is way in advance even of the exile, let alone the return. But Israel just has to get right with God, has to leave the land of captivity, and has to return to help rebuild Judah.

D. Comfort was there, salvation was not

What did many Jews do? Nothing, they stayed where they were. Comfort was theirs, but eternal salvation was not. You can preach that to people; there is a lot of parallels here. Many people are perfectly comfortable and they will be comfortable most of their life. They will die comfortably with plenty of Morphine to take away the pain. So comfort is available in modern times just as it was for many, many Jews in the Persian Empire but that is different from salvation. That is what Isaiah is trying to say. “Yes, it may be harder. Yes, it may be more challenging. Yes, it may involve difficulties. Yes, it is a long way to go. Yes, there are all these barriers to doing it but the will of God is to come home. Quite a contrast and great stuff there in the second part of Isaiah.

E. New Israel

You already see increasingly in Isaiah what Paul will pick up in a great way. You see the term *Israel* being broadened, the Israel of God, some of those concepts are there already in the second part of Isaiah. What is Israel? Who is His people? It is not everybody who is ethnically an Israelite; it is those who believe and respond in faith and come back to Orthodox worship. It is not just anybody who has the genes that cause him to be able to say, “I’m descended from Abraham.”

F. New creation

In addition, you have a great emphasis on the New Creation. A lot of New Creation language in the second part of Isaiah. So the theme of the New Creation that Paul and others bring up is not something that springs new with them; they are following the lead of what God already inspired through Isaiah.

G. Servant songs

Then the servant songs in chapters 40-53 are a wonderful. By the way, if you look carefully, the servant really is a Moses figure. Themes like identifying with the people and exodus and all that. Those themes are there. Christ is the new Moses. He is a lot of things. He is the new Israel. He is the new Jacob. Christ is the new David. But among other things, he is the new Moses. Christ does a lot of things all at once. Thus, the suffering servant leads God’s people as Moses did, as Christ did. They are His body. That is not nearly as clearly played out in the Moses’ stories in say Exodus through Deuteronomy as you have it in Christ, but Moses is the representative of the people and so he suffers when they suffer. He does not say, “Well, that is your problem.” No, he always gets what they get. That is part of Moses’ involvement with the people, and you see that theme in the second part of Isaiah. He is their head; he suffers for them and Moses has some of that. He does not enter the Promise Land; they do. He is also vindicated by God on their behalf because of his faithfulness. These themes that are thin and partial in Moses,

of course, and are full-blown and beautiful and complete in Christ. I do not mean to say that Christ is just anything; He is not just anything, but He is the ultimate fulfillment of some of the things that Moses is in on in this Moses language of the servant of God.

Background to the Post-Exilic Books

Tonight we look at the section called *Return and Rebuilding*. I will start with just a comment about and a very brief reading from 1 Chronicles 9 and then we will go in alphabetical order, which really means going Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, then Ezra and Nehemiah.

I. 1 Chronicles 9

1 Chronicles 9 is the end of the genealogy section of 1 Chronicles and its value for us is where it brings us in terms of the whole Bible story. *Adam* is the first word in 1 Chronicles 1. You have a chronicler starting the story right back with Adam. Then you come to 1 Chronicles 9, at the end of the genealogies, you are told that the people of Judah were taken captive at Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. Then, the chronicler immediately writes about how the first resettled on their own property in their own towns were some Israelites, priests, Levites, and temple servants. Names are mentioned of various people who had come back. Why such an emphasis on musicians and people who were involved with the religious activities? The answer is that the chronicler is deeply concerned, writing sometime around 530 BC, with helping people appreciate the importance of getting the temple rebuilt. We have talked about this before; I just make this reference back again to what the chronicler is doing.

A. The Genealogies

If you would look at the genealogies in Chronicles very carefully, it does require some time, you will see that none of them goes down further than about 530, 520 BC. Right around that time; that is when all the genealogies leave off. Actually at the end of chapter 9 you see a new genealogy start, the genealogy of Saul, that is where the chronicler goes back to Saul's day and then starts over again.

1. The chronicler gives you a genealogy from Adam to 530 BC.

2. Then goes back and starts around 1050 BC with Saul very quickly, and then a lot on David and Solomon; lots and lots and lots on David and Solomon. David and Solomon had as one of their primary interests the building of the original temple. David wanted to do it; God would not let him. Saul did do it and the chronicler tells you everything you want to know about that temple and more.

B. Importance of Rebuilding the Temple

The temple is a very, very big concern. I think we all understand that at 530 BC the temple had lain in ruins for fifty-six years. It was 586, that great turning point year that Lamentations, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel talk about when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, took Judah captive, and exiled tens of thousands of people abroad and so on. That great year the temple was destroyed.

C. Major problems because the temple was destroyed

A lot of problems occur when the temple is destroyed. For example, suppose now in New Testament times, the times we are living in, the New Covenant era, somebody said, "God is going to destroy the temple." What would that mean? Now, you see, God still has a temple; it is us. People are His temple. That is the way it works; that is what the New Testament teaches us. It is no longer a building; it is people. What is the purpose of a temple? The answer is that it is a place for God to inhabit, to dwell in. In the Old Testament it is a building. It is very important. They have got to have a building. Otherwise God is not dwelling there in their midst. In the New Covenant it is people. God has to have people. Now He does not have to have anything, but if He is going to have

a temple He certainly has to have people. We are His temple as Paul explains. As His temple, we have God dwelling in us. We could not possibly be His temple without God dwelling in us; you would not really have a temple. It is not a temple unless God dwells in it.

We are the containers for God to work. It goes right back to the image of God concept in the beginning of Genesis, let's make people in our own image. The idea that there is not that we look like God or resemble Him in some ontological way but that we are His representatives; we do His will. If we are His temple, then He is in us, we accomplish His purposes, and we take Him with us wherever we go. The theory is that we always have God with us and, as we do our things, we accomplish His purposes as well as fulfilling Jesus' teaching of the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The temple is important and it will be a big issue, not only for the chronicler but also for Haggai and for Zechariah and in another way for Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Getting the temple built is the big issue for the chronicler, Haggai and Zechariah because they all write before it is rebuilt. It still remains in ruins, totally destroyed as the Babylonians did it, when they all are dealing with this issue. It does get built and Ezra and Nehemiah come afterwards along with Malachi when there is a temple. So their concern is not getting one built; that is not their concern at all. Their concern is properly taking care of it, properly worshipping within it, properly doing the things that ought to be done. And again, there is a nice, New Testament, New Covenant analogy. Our problem, if anybody is in Christ, if anybody said, "Yes, I believe Christ died for me on the cross, I accept Him as my Savior," that person has got the Holy Spirit. God does not say, "I don't know if I will or not with that person." No, God gives the Holy Spirit. But the question is, what will you do about it? Will you nourish the work of the Spirit in you? Where will you quench the Spirit? That was the question for Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Will we do right by God? Will we honor Him in His temple or will it be desecrated? Will it be defiled? Will things that take place there be selfish things done for the benefit of people rather than for the proper worship of God? So if you want a single theme to hand things on during this time of restoration, the temple certainly has a lot of interconnections. It is a big, big topic. As we start tonight with Haggai, we will certainly be talking a lot about the temple.

II. The Persian Empire

Before we get precisely to Haggai, let me present the extent of the Persian Empire. When the Persians took over the Babylonian Empire in 540 BC, they already had a big empire of their own, the Medeo-Persian Empire. The Medeo-Persian Empire was and it was massive. They did extend it. There is a part of India. So they have got the empire going to India and you can see going up into what we would call Northern India and parts of Afghanistan and so on and all the way up to the Aral Sea and then through the Caspian and so on, they have got a massive empire there. Then they took over the Babylonian Empire and extended even further into Egypt, Libya, and much of Europe; they went all the way to Greece. The only people who were successful in resisting them in terms of serious opposition were the Greeks. The Greeks did resist but only partly successfully. Ever after 540 BC the Greeks kept fighting back, kept pushing and kept trying to beat back the Persians. There were some periods of time when the Greeks were in fact very successful. You really would have to draw the empire going just to the edge of modern day Turkey because the Greeks had beaten them back. Then there would be lots and lots of wars as Persian emperors kept trying to suppress the Greek territories that they had conquered and as the Greeks kept trying to push back and so on. It is a vast empire; the size of that empire is just enormous. The only thing that eclipses it and even then only rather slightly, it eclipses it in terms of numbers of people but otherwise does not go as far in some directions as, of course, the Roman Empire. We are at the stage now where the Persian Empire is enormous.

A. Attitude toward conquered territories

Remember, the Persians had a different attitude toward conquered territory. That is the big change. God brought the Persians on the scene. The Assyrians and Babylonians always practiced a vicious control over the

territories the conquered, brutal control, exile the population, replaced them with others. But the Persians said, “No, no, this exile business we don’t do.” The Persian King Cyrus the Great said, “I don’t do exiles.” He just would not do it; it was not their style, it was not anything that they wanted to do. It probably occurred to them because they knew how the system worked but they just did not do it. This meant suddenly that the world, the known world, was under the control of an entirely new kind of regime. This Persian Empire system said we do not like exiles, and therefore in God’s providence they were also open to the idea that people who had been exiled would not need to remain exiled.

B. The Decree of Cyrus

As a matter of general policy it was the concept of Cyrus the Great to be open to the very thing that in all probability Daniel got accomplished, and that was the Decree of Cyrus. It is the decree that is printed at the end of 2 Chronicles and at the beginning of Ezra that says any Jew anywhere can go back home. In fact, if they will do so, they will be assisted with funds because they should go back for a certain purpose that Cyrus approves of—to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. It further says, “The people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.” That the Jews should return to build the temple for the God who is the God of Israel is a key part of the Decree of Cyrus.

C. Syncretism of Cyrus

You might say, how would that fit with the theology of a guy like Cyrus the Great? The answer is it fits with his *syncretism*, a term we have used a couple of times before. Syncretism is the way of looking at religion that says we are going to blend together beliefs. Usually Syncretists are people who feel that all religions have some value. I bet you will have met plenty of people who have said, “Oh yeah, I think all paths lead to God.” Anybody who is a pluralist in general who says, “Well, I think Jews are saved on their terms, Christians on theirs, Buddhists on theirs, whatever, that is a Syncretist, that is essentially syncretistic thinking.

The full-blown Syncretism that people like Cyrus that Persians in general practiced was actually not just saying all religions have some validity, they certainly said that, but in addition they said they would worship any god they could. So instead of saying, “You can be a Buddhist, that is fine for you and you will go to heaven because you are sincere, and I will be a Christian and I will go to heaven because I am sincere.” They said, “Well, why don’t you worship my god and I’ll worship yours and we will both get more benefits that way.” Full Syncretism really tries to add everybody else’s religion to ones own.

A king like Cyrus would have had no trouble thinking that there really was a Yahweh, this God of the Jews in Jerusalem. That would not be in any way difficult for him because he would think there are hundreds or thousands of gods and goddesses. He might also think that that God was pretty impressive because of what Daniel had been able to do. Daniel had a lot of influence in the Babylonian and Persian court, and that was perhaps effective on this thinking. It is also not impossible that he said, “I can’t evaluate just how powerful this God is, but why offend Him? If we can have Him re-inhabit His temple and thus be properly worshipped, His power may grow, and He will be good to me.” There was a natural interest in having the temple built so that the people there could worship and at the same time pray for the royal family back in Persia. That was the idea. In a later point in the Book of Ezra the people are reminded that one of the things that is supposed to happen is that the temple should be rebuilt in order to provide a place where prayers will be given for “the king and his sons.” That way of thinking about what the temple is supposed to be is very, very natural to the Babylonian way of thinking in a small way but the Persian now way of thinking in a very, very big way.

Instructions are given that the temple can finally be rebuilt and then you see in places like Ezra 6:10 that there is added in the statement, “So that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the wellbeing of the king and his sons.” The temple, again, a big idea even in the official mentality of the Persians.

They would not, of course, have all the right motives. They are syncretistic, polytheistic, largely pantheistic, as well and idolatrous and so on, but God gets His purposes even out of these pagan idolaters, the Persians. That is the picture that presents itself to us.

III. Chronological Order

Let me just be sure that you have a sense of the chronological order of things. Here is a quick look at the Post-Exilic Books in order.

1. Chronicles around 530
2. Haggai around 520
3. Zechariah 520-500
4. Malachi at about 460
5. Ezra about 458
6. Nehemiah arrives about 444

7. There is also Esther, but Esther is more exilic. The date 440 would not necessarily apply to when Esther was queen, that would be a little bit earlier, but that is the reason for listing Esther in there. Thus, Esther could be the last book in chronological order in composition but you cannot tell for sure; it is not certain.

That is just an overview to give you a feel for how we are proceeding chronologically.

Haggai and Zechariah

I. Overview of Haggai

A. Three months in 520 BC

This is a little two-chapter book of prophecies that take place all within three months in a single year. The year is 520 BC; it is all clearly dated. Haggai is the only prophet that provides a date for all of his prophecies. There are a total of four prophets who give some specific dates to the times that they received oracles from the Lord. Daniel has a couple, Ezekiel has a bunch, Zechariah has a bunch, and Haggai has four, but Haggai has only four total prophecies. Haggai alone dates all of his prophecies and they are all right within this short period of time.

B. Theme: Encourage the building of the temple

The building of the temple is a big, big theme in 520 BC when he is writing. The temple now, at 520 BC, had been in ruins since 586. That is sixty-six years that that temple had stayed absent from the scene. The Babylonians had systematically taken it down and left only the bedrock so that it had to be rebuilt, even its foundations, as we read in the actual description in the Book of Ezra which covers back to that time in its prologue portions. A big thing about what Haggai is doing is encouraging a couple of people, one named Zerubbabel and one named Jeshua. Who are they? Zerubbabel is the governor of Judah. He is actually a descendant of David and presumably under the influence of Daniel. The Persians appointed him a descendent of David which everybody felt was appropriate for leadership in Judah. He is not a king, but at least there is a descendent of David in leadership in Jerusalem. He is a Jew who is allowed to come back from Babylon to Judah and be the governor. He gets an official Persian appointment. Also Jeshua or Joshua. It is usually written Jeshua, but it is essentially the same name as Joshua. It is a little like Richard, Dick, Rich, Ricky, all those forms. These are not different names so it is just a question of how you may choose to do it or how you might spell John or Jon. All the different ways you can spell some names like Amy. You can think of a lot of possibilities. Joshua or Jeshua is the high priest. These are the two leaders; the political leader and the religious leader. They were leaders at 520 BC and they need encouragement. A lot of what Haggai does is to encourage them as much as he can. They get mentioned prominently and in particular Zerubbabel gets a lot of encouragement, as he got the organizational responsibility to get all the people of Judah together and get them going and supporting this and giving their money to it and coming to work as laborers.

C. Content

1. Problem unless temple is rebuilt

He talks about the problems that will happen unless the temple is rebuilt, problems that are already happening.

2. Promise of glory for future temple

Haggai talks about what a great thing it will be to have the temple, how important it will be, and how there will be future glory in it. If you read the first chapter of the Gospel of John, it starts to make sense to you what Haggai predicted because John talks about how we have seen His glory and then Christ comes into the temple Himself and does the things He does there as part of the way that God's glory returns in the fullest sense to the temple.

3. Susceptibility of defilement

We also have a passage about how easy it is for sin to grow. How easily people naturally get defiled by sin. If you do nothing, sin will find you. But how careful one must be to find righteousness. Nobody accidentally gets righteous with God. Nobody can say, "You know, I didn't do a thing about it but somehow here I am in heaven." It will not work that way. But plenty of people can say, "You know, I didn't do a thing about it and I ended up somehow here in hell. How did that happen?" Plenty of people will be able to say that. They will not be accurate in saying, "I did not do a thing about it," they did plenty, but it will feel so natural. That is part of what Haggai teaches.

4. Power over the nations

Finally, it will eventually become more obvious to them that the Lord is over all nations and He has chosen Zerubbabel to do His will.

D. Similarity to Zechariah

Interestingly, this is also one of the themes that we find in the Book of Zechariah, encouragement to the same two people with some of the prophecies from the same year. You will see that when we get to it. Zechariah, Haggai's friend, associate, and co-prophet, encourages people to listen to those guys Zerubbabel and Jeshua and says, "Let me tell you," says the Lord, "these are my people, I have chosen them. I want them to be absolutely listened to. I'm backing them and they have my authority behind them," and so on. All kinds of encouragement for these two people, which is unusual. You do not find other books which give that sort of level of encouragement to two particular leaders by name. You can find psalms, the royal psalms, that give a lot of encouragement to the kingship in general, and we appreciate those, and you can certainly find prophecies that upon careful examination are intended to support the plan of a given king. You can find prophets encouraging kings to be strong and so on, but the kind of words that are said about Zerubbabel and Joshua are awfully grand. Found at the end of Haggai, "Zerubbabel is my signet ring says the Lord. He is the ring on my finger," kind of thing. Just very, very substantial assurance for these two.

E. Why the emphasis on encouragement?

1. Started building the temple in 538 BC

If you turn to Ezra 3, you will read about how Zerubbabel and Joshua were involved in rebuilding the altar in Jerusalem and celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, which was very important, and then in rebuilding the temple. But, this was 538 BC. In other words, what Ezra 3 describes is the beginning of rebuilding under the leadership of these two guys in 538. It is really right after they got back; First the Decree of Cyrus in 540, and then the first wave of exiles return 539. They do not waste too much time and they start rebuilding the temple. Here is the way it is described in Ezra 3:10. "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests, the Levites, and the others took places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.' All the people gave a great shout because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid and many of the older folks were weeping," I do not think they were weeping because they were miserable, I think they were weeping for joy, "others shouted for joy." It says in the final verse, "People couldn't distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping because the people made so much noise. The sound was heard far away." Then it says in chapter 4, "When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, 'Let us help you,' this was turned down." In verse 4 of chapter 4, "The peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and to make them afraid to go on building." A lot of fear is described in subsequent chapters.

2. Zerubbabel and Jeshua caved when opposition came

The problem was simple enough. Zerubbabel and Jeshua had lead the initial rebuilding effort in 538 BC but had chickened out when opposition came. Here it is in Haggai's day and in Zechariah's day too, eighteen years later; these are not the kind of people most are going to rally behind.

3. Why support failures?

Why would you go with a has-been? It is just not the kind of thing most folks will do. We do not see a huge wave of sentiment for bringing back Jimmy Carter as president do we? It is not necessarily that Carter is such a bad guy, but there is not much sentiment there. People do not tend to do that. It is not a way that most people think. If there is a feeling that perhaps somebody failed in a large way, that can be the last person you want to vote for to lead you once again. So these two guys had been failures. You did not have a voting system there so the high priest inherited his office and the governor was appointed. If they were going to have the ability to get people to join them in rebuilding they had a terrible problem to overcome. They were the failures of eighteen years prior. They were the ones who, when the opposition came, backed off. That is why God needs to give them an extra measure of encouragement.

4. Public endorsement by God through prophets

He needs to tell everybody through His prophets, "No, I'm endorsing these guys. Your leaders are these guys. They are not just your leaders, they are My choice. I've chosen them. I have put them here and the fact that they failed almost two decades ago is of no relevance now. They are going to do it now. It is going to happen because I have decided it is going to happen." Here you have God working with previously failed leaders. This will be a challenge for many of you in a church. It is very hard if the kid who was president of your youth group and could think only of car-washes and dances as the purpose of the youth group last year gets reelected this year, you are going to go, "Oh great." In a church, if somebody who has not done what he or she should have done in prior years, is suddenly made chair of the Board of Deacons, that is no fun, but it can be that it is exactly what God has in mind. You cannot rule it out. God's choices are often completely different from what ours would be. Anyway, Haggai is just encouraging this and saying, "It is high time to get the temple rebuilt; indeed, we don't have much time left." These are just some truths from Haggai.

II. Themes in Haggai

I am always trying to encourage you folks not merely to learn this stuff but to use it and in your class or Bible study or sermon series here is just some of the things that you can get from Haggai. What I did, in this case, was to look in a one-volume Bible commentary. There is an evangelical Bible commentary which is published by Baker Books and edited by Walter Elwell and Herman Austel did the article on Haggai. I just turned to it and I said, "Let me see what I can find." It turned out to be a very good, nice, brief article, and it give these four points from the Book of Haggai. I have condensed and put them in my own words. These are great things for people to get, great concepts.

A. God and his work must take first place

God and His work must take first place in the life of His people, only that way is God honored. That is a big theme in this book. Why are you spending money on yourselves? Why are you paying attention to yourselves? Why don't you get going? You have got to get going. Yes, it will be hard to build the temple. Of course it will be expensive. Of course it will take time. Of course you will have to leave what you otherwise would be doing and come and help, but it has got to happen.

B. Putting personal interests ahead of God is self-defeating

Haggai says that putting personal or selfish interests ahead of God is self-defeating. It is the reason that you have got economic and agricultural problems of all sorts. If you read through Haggai you notice that he talks about crop disasters, people having produce of all sorts rotting away, many sorts of difficulties financially, some very rich people doing well but many poor struggling. It is self-defeating to try to solve that problem without first solving your relationship to God.

C. God blesses those who put him first

God does give His blessings richly to those who put His interests before their own. Malachi has some of the same teaching in it that Jesus has, in say, Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God," and that is when the other things that God wants you to have, you get.

D. Work is valued by how it conforms to God's will

What is the value of somebody's work? It is not to be compared to work of others. You value what your work is by how it conforms to God's will. If you think about Zerubbabel's temple, at the time it probably was insignificant compared to Solomon's. It was probably as big as Solomon's but not nearly so fancy. What Solomon was able to do was to build an ornate, truly beautiful and impressive looking temple. This temple was the same size but probably not at all as fancy. It had the bulk but not the quality of decoration. But, in God's sight it is was very important to His overall purpose. He cannot be properly worshipped without it, which is the most basic thing that you are supposed to do as His follower is to worship Him. In the Old Covenant you just cannot properly worship without a building. You have got to have a building in the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant you have got to have people who belong to Him and who come together and are His temple. That is how it works.

III. Dates in Haggai and Zechariah

This may be more information than you need, but I want to illustrate something. The Persian king in 520 BC is named Darius the first, and 520 BC is his second year as king. He started in 522. These are the times when Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during his time:

1. Haggai, second year sixth month.
2. Haggai, second year, seventh month.
3. Zechariah, second year, eighth month (we are not sure of the day).
4. Haggai, second year, ninth month.
5. Haggai, second year ninth month again.
6. Zechariah, second year eleventh month.
7. Zechariah, fourth year ninth month.

This is the way they date their prophecies. Obviously there was something very important about the second year of Darius. Let me just give you a bit of historical sense of this. Cyrus is the Great is the emperor who created that huge Persian Empire and then died a few years later leaving his weak son Cambyses in charge starting about 532 BC. Not long afterwards Cambyses died or was assassinated, it is not totally clear. Then a series of different people began vying for this vast empire. From roughly 531 to 522 BC there was a lot of misery, unhappiness, and uncertainty. What was left of the few people in Judah wondered what was going to happen. But this guy Darius, who was not in the Cyrus family, had been a military leader in the Persian Empire, took over and really absolutely wrapped it up.

So, from 522 to 520 he put the military in great shape, went all over the empire, suppressed all rebellion as far away as necessary, and reestablished the empire stronger than ever. By the second year, he boasts of having defeated ten different kings who tried to give him grief either on the borders of the empire or within the empire, various people who had been captured previously and now would love to have been free from the Persians or anybody else; nobody likes to be a captive of anybody else. You do not want to be in anybody else's empire, you want to have your own. By 520 BC in the providence of God he just had stabilized everything and this allowed for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. How did He allow it? How was that massive, general stability going to do that? The answer is that it is going to prevent lawlessness over in Palestine.

If you have a weak central government busy trying to fight off enemies, maybe up here in Sogdiana or something, you are not going to worry about it. The Persians are located far away, they are not going to worry about what is going on over there and therefore the Samaritans, Edomites, and Moabites can really threaten the Jews to prevent them from rebuilding that temple. But if you have a tremendous, strong, central empire that is firmly in control and has troops well-distributed and so on, people cannot take the law into their own hands. All they can do is to say to government in Persia, "We don't think this temple should be allowed." What the Book of Ezra partly tells about is how the Jews in Jerusalem finally wrote during the days of Darius and got a letter back, an official decree saying, "Get out of there. Leave these people alone. They have a perfect right to build that temple. Indeed they are doing it on Persian government authority." So that was the kind of security that God was able to bring about and that undergirded the whole process, gave everybody a sense that it could happen because otherwise people would be inclined to say, "Look, things are in turmoil. Who knows what is going to happen? We have got permission, we think, to build this but suppose we are attacked by our enemies? Nobody around from the Persian government can help us and support us and set this thing right." When that tremendously well-established stability came about in 520 BC the whole scene was entirely different. It was a big part of how God allowed the temple to be rebuilt. That is really what I want to say about our pal Haggai. It is a little book and we spent plenty of time on it, but it is useful to get the perspective of that aloud.

IV. Orienting Data for Zechariah

A. Haggai and Zechariah

Remember that Haggai and Zechariah are not just next to each other in the Old Testament, they were also friends with each other. Mention is made in the Book of Ezra that they were supporting one another. Here is the clearest case we know of prophets working together, other than Elijah and Elisha. Did Isaiah and Micah probably work together, pray for each other, regularly go to hear each other preach the word of God, and pray and so on? Sure, probably they did. The same thing with many other people. Did Ezekiel cheer on Jeremiah and vice versa? In all probability, yes. But we do not know that. What we do know is that sometimes you have records of cases where they really were contemporaries and associates and we know that about Haggai and Zechariah.

It is not surprising that we would get things related to rebuilding the temple, especially in visions. However, Zechariah is much more apocalyptic than Haggai. Indeed, the first nine chapters have a lot of apocalyptic in them. A preponderance of those chapters is apocalyptic so basically half the book of Zechariah. They both want to get the temple rebuilt and the community of Judah so that there will be a future hope just as Haggai said. They both extrapolate the need to remain faithful.

Zechariah goes a lot further in time than Haggai. Haggai cuts off still in 520 BC, Zechariah is moving down to 500 or 495 or so and he is looking forward in a much broader scheme of things as apocalyptic does. As you might imagine, Zechariah has prophecies directly about the coming of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross, actual crucifixion language, and Christ's reign. I think Zechariah also even has things that relate to Christ's second coming. We will not talk a huge amount about that now, but if you preach Zechariah, you will be preaching Messianic messages very substantially as you get toward the end of the book.

B. He too is a Jerusalem prophet

C. Same time period but he goes further.

D. And again, his emphases

1. Get that temple rebuilt because that is what is part of the way God chose to work under the Old Covenant and if you do not have a temple you do not have His presence and blessing.
2. Encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua to lead the Jews properly.
3. The certainty of God's final victory.
4. The need to get the temple completed by 516 BC.
5. The final victory of the Messiah over all opposing forces. Those are great themes of Scripture.

V. Overview of Zechariah

I would also like to give just a special feel for how Zechariah's visions fit together. We have talked about it some in connection with other prophets, but Zechariah is just so dominated by visions early on that when you study Zechariah you really need to be reminded of the rules of interpreting visions, what they are like and the kinds of things you find. There is an introduction to the book which is a lovely thing, but then comes his first vision. It is quite interesting.

A. First Vision

He sees horseman who have been going all around the world. "We've been riding around the world," they say. They report to a certain angel. They say, "The whole world is stable." Could God have seen that just by looking? Of course, but God loves to work through people including through angels. Remember, they are a prior creation and undoubtedly in His plan. He chose to work through them just as He does in our creation. He works through us. He will even wait for us to get it. He will wait. That is an amazing thing. If I were God, I would not do it. If He uses us He certainly uses angels. In this picture Zechariah just sees this happen right on the edge of Jerusalem. He sees these angels all come riding in from around the world on their super angelic horses and they report, "We've seen everything and now blessing can be given to the temple, to the city, and to the land."

B. Second Vision

In the second vision he sees four horns coming at him. Now, the second vision is very nice in terms of the way that it illustrates how visions tend to get clearer as the prophet keeps looking. There is a lot of visionary material in Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation about seeing something and trying to understand it, then seeing a little more and trying to understand that, and then seeing a little more and trying to process that. That is the way that it commonly happens. Let me read from that vision, 1:18 and following: "I looked up—and there before me were four horns! I asked the angel speaking to me, 'What are these?'" Zechariah has an angel that God assigns to him to explain visions. That is how he learns a lot of stuff; he just has this angel show up. So he sees a vision and then there is an angel by him, so he can ask the angel for explanations because he does not know. "And he answered me, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem.'" If you think about it horn is a symbol of power, indeed the Hebrew word meaning *horn* can also be translated *power*. What four horns scattered Israel and Judah? It is the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Persians, those are the four. The four greatest superpowers that the Israelites ever had to deal with. They all played a role in keeping the people out somewhere. The Persians least of all because the Persians were not practitioners of exile but they are one of the powers that has to be worried about if the people are going to be able to feel secure. Then he sees more.

“Then the Lord showed me four *craftsmen*,” the NIV says *craftsmen*. I do not blame the NIV, it is a difficult word to translate, but I do not think that is what it means at all. In my forthcoming commentary on Zechariah, I have a long explanation of why that word has to mean, it is a rare word in Hebrew, *farmhands*. That is what it is. It is not craftsmen, it is people who work on a farm; farm workers. “So four farm workers come and I ask, ‘Well, what are these coming to do? I see the four horns, what are the four farm workers coming to do?’” These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head. Everybody was ashamed and embarrassed, All had been in trouble, but the farm workers were coming to scare them and, actually it says, to throw down these horns in the NIV. I think it basically means, make them go back. That is another translation question. “The nations who lifted their horns against the land of Judah and scattered its people are going to go home.” Basically what happens is this—it is four horns on a couple of oxen or something; that is the way it is symbolized. So he sees these oxen coming along, but all he sees are the horns. He does not really see the animal, just the horns. Who is capable of rounding up the oxen and saying, “Come on, come on. Shame on you for breaking out of the pen. Let’s go.” And they throw ropes around them. In those days they put rings in the noses of the big animals and pull them. Simple.

Almost all visions are really very simple. When you analyze them they are super simple because it is not the vision that is the issue. The issue is not what he saw, that there were four horns and four farm workers. That is not it. The issue is what God is promising by that simple visual aide. What he is promising is no more grief from those great nations. You are going to have a long period of stability. Nobody is going to scatter you anywhere. You’re never going to be exiled again and they never were. When God changed Israel over to the kingdom of God to the church there was a wonderful diaspora that you know took place when the Romans attacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. That is a different thing. You can build the temple, you can settle down, you can re-worship, you can do all the things you should do because now there is stability.

C. Third Vision

The third vision is a man who wants to measure Jerusalem. “No, no, can’t measure it, it is going to be un-measurable. Jerusalem in the New Covenant, ultimately, will be so big nobody can put boundaries on it because we are all going to live there; all the redeemed are going to live in Jerusalem. In other words, everybody is going to be in the presence of God. In the final analysis we are all going to have the same address and we are all going to have the same father, we are all going to be brothers and sisters for all eternity. It is a great picture. Even Zechariah is starting to look forward to that. Then there are some commands corresponding to visions.

D. Fourth Vision

Then comes the fourth vision which is of the high priest Joshua getting reassurance. He comes in wearing dirty, old clothes that priest cannot wear, as priests have to have pure beautiful clothing on properly to honor God. The priest gets a change of clothing and that symbolizes his acceptance before God.

E. Fifth Vision

The fifth vision is very simple again. The temple lampstand had an olive tree motif on either side. It was a decorated lampstand and there were these olive branch decorations, nice metal work in olive branch style. We know that because that is described back in the Book of Exodus. He sees that temple lampstand and those olive branches symbolizing the good old governor Zerubbabel and the good old high priest Joshua. Again, another simple imagistic way of saying, “These are my people, they are the ones I have chosen, it will work, the temple will be rebuilt. These losers are going to lead the people successfully and get this temple built.” What a promise.

F. Sixth Vision

The sixth vision is a scroll flying around. The problem is that it might also be a sickle and that is just a question of translation. We have just got a word that happens to have the possibility of meaning either scroll or sickle. A

scroll is curved because you curve the paper, and a sickle has a curved blade. So it is a curved, the Hebrew says *a curved*, and that is the challenge. It symbolizes the purification of both civil and religious strife. Could be the way a sickle cuts and cleans. It could be the way a scroll is truth and brings purity. Hard to know.

G. Seventh Vision

In the seventh vision, there is a measuring basket with a woman in it who represents evil. This is not because Zechariah thinks women are evil, that is just a symbol. What happens to this woman? She is sent away to Babylon, deported to Babylon, let them have the sin. It is just a simple way of saying, "I'm forgiving you. I am not holding anything against you. I will punish Babylon but not you. My punishment for you is over."

H. Final Vision

In the final vision there are four horse drawn chariots symbolizing the four winds of heaven or spirits. Another problem in Hebrew: *wind* and *spirit* are the exact same word, indicating God's omnipotence throughout the earth. Not so much bringing a report back that all is peaceful, but they are now saying that God is in control. He is projecting His power by these chariots; the chariot being the ultimate fighting machine of ancient times, all around the world. It is just a feel for what you have got.

If you were to preach from the Book of Zechariah, you have got eight great sermons just on the visions. Because all of them are making big points, not just things that will relate only to Zechariah's day in the temple but are talking about God's sovereignty, the need to be faithful, the nature of God's covenant, God's promises being fulfilled, great themes that you can preach and that is just a relatively small portion of the whole book.

Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah

I. "The Latter Days"

I want to go on and talk about a term, *The Latter Days*. I just want to show you this because it relates to so many things in the New Testament, yet is misunderstood when people hear it. You are certainly going to have a natural encounter with this. You will talk to a member of your Bible study, class, or congregation and they will say, "We must be in the last days." On one hand you can say, "Yeah, we sure are, there is no question about that."

What they are meaning by it is that they are convinced that since Israel became a nation in 1947 or since George Bush the anti-Christ or something they have figured out, whatever they are thinking, they just think now it is suddenly the last days. Here is what the last days represent.

1. Judgment
2. Oppression
3. Persecution
4. False teaching, deception, apostasy.

These are just some of the references. This is really an outline here of how it all works, the notion of the last days. But wonderfully in the last days there is also the happy theme of returning to the Lord, so there is tribulation.

A. Tribulation

It is a tribulation that I think is basically ongoing. It is not some particular thing or any particular time in history, but the idea that there will be opposition to God's kingdom is very important to appreciate. You can get the misimpression from Daniel or Ezekiel that once the temple was rebuilt everything would be smooth. Daniel is telling you, "Oh no, it is going to be very hard for God's people." Ezekiel and Zechariah are saying, "Things will get worse and worse, a lot worse before it gets better." The tribulation aspect is there but it is balanced by a wonderful promise of return. That is part of the notion of the last days.

B. Return to the Lord

So whenever you hear the language *in the last days*, in Hebrew, *in the latter days*, this is the kind of thing you find and a lot of evidence of return to the Lord. Notice how many of these passages are from Daniel or from Ezekiel because Daniel is such an influential prophet in this whole area.

C. Messianic Victory

A Messiah. The last days are indicated by the victory of the Messiah. If you want, you can say, "Oh well, that means the Messiah has to come and beat Canada and has to beat Japan and so on." You can have that attitude and many people do.

The nations of the world will all conspire against him. That is one way to read it. However, I think that when Christ talks about victory as He does, especially as he does in John 10, "Now the ruler of this world is defeated," that that is really fulfilling these. Christ has in fact overcome all earthly powers because nobody can stop you from going to heaven. No nation of the world with any power it can assemble, military, political, or economic, can do anything to stop you from loving Christ and from Him loving you. They can kill your body but that is irrelevant to the process. It will not do a thing to keep you from going to heaven; it has no effect at all. That is where the real

victory is. If you are thinking about some sort of earthly contest, I just think you are looking in the wrong place. He conquers all enemies, all opponents of God.

D. The saints are raised from the dead

The saints are raised from the dead. Clearly, that has not happened. Some would argue that that brief resurrection, the resuscitation that we have in the description of the Gospels where a lot of the saints came out of the tombs and walked around, would be a fulfillment of that. I think it is probably a little more of a sample just to remind us that Christ's power includes power over death. I do think this is an aspect of the last days that really is at the culmination. That is why it is in the last chapter of Daniel and so on.

E. New Covenant

Then a New Covenant characteristic of the last days, the New Covenant is in Christ's blood we are certainly in that. He says, every time you do this recognize that this is the New Covenant in My blood. You do not have to wait until now for a New Covenant, that came with Christ.

F. New Kingdom with a Davidic King

Then a new kingdom ruled over by a Davidic king. We are in that kingdom, so that condition is well established now.

G. Gentiles experience deliverance

Then many Gentiles experience deliverance. In a lot of the prophetic books, if you look for it, you will find reference in one way or another to the broadening out of God's people. No longer just Israel, but also the various nations of the world. Sometimes it is said, as it is given in Zechariah, "In those days, all the nations of Europe will come up and worship the Lord in the Jerusalem and if they don't they will not get any rain." In other words, wither away and die. It is prophetic symbolic way of saying, "God will have His people everywhere and that will be the real action, to worship God and to know Him truly, in His presence. It will be among all people not just among us in Jerusalem. The Last Days. It is something to do with some combination of these seven factors: Tribulation, Return of the Lord, Messianic Victory, Resurrection, New Covenant, New Kingdom, and the Democratization of the Good News. It spreads out to all the nations. I would argue that all of those except for the resurrection of the dead have already been underway; we are in the last days, they are underway. They will be capped off by the resurrection and the final judgment and that is how history will come to an end.

II. Closing of the Prophetic Canon

Let me also comment about the Prophetic Canon because we are going to come to Malachi now. With Malachi we get the end of Old Testament prophecy; the closing of the prophetic canon. Malachi is the last of the prophets as far as we know. His time is right about 460 BC. What can you say about the last prophet and his circumstances? The first prophet, Amos, apparently prophesied right around 760 BC and the last prophet 460. It looks very close to 300 years; it could have been to the day but we just do not know; we simply do not have it that precisely given.

A. Restoration barely underway

1. Spiritually

One thing you can say is that in Malachi's day when Old Testament prophecy ends, the restoration is underway but just barely. There is a restoration but things are hard. When you look at Malachi you observe the situation is not highly positive. Is there a temple? Yes. Are people worshipping at Jerusalem? Yes, but they have

got a lot of things wrong. There is a lot of corruption, a lot of lack of faith, a lot of failure to keep the covenant. Malachi has to preach a lot of judgment and criticism against people who should have learned their lesson.

2. Politically

Secondly, the situation politically was one was one of domination. The Persians in Malachi's day are still very much in control of everything. Yes they are benign compared to the Assyrians and the Babylonians but there is a Persian governor in place. It closes off the prophetic era. It closes off with a foreign power in charge over God's people. Somehow there has to be deliverance from that. The interesting thing is that Christ delivers by saying, "My kingdom is not even of this world. So I'm not going to deliver you politically because you do not need it. That is not the deliverance you need. You need to get into My kingdom which does not even have anything to do with politics. That is the wonderful solution to it all."

3. Economically

Economically things are tough as Haggai indicates; terrible inflation and so on. Malachi reflects some of that hardship.

B. Restoration depends upon Messianic arrival

The restoration per say, depended on the arrival of the Messiah and full restoration would require unhindered Messianic reign. So the extent of the full restoration is where everything, all the promises of God, are really given fully to His people. All the wondrous predictions from the end of Leviticus and the end of Deuteronomy and most of the end of the Prophets and so on, that is still to come. Much of it is fulfilled, but not all of it by any means. We are still looking forward to many richer blessings.

C. Restoration expected the Holy Spirit

Furthermore, the full restoration expects the Holy Spirit. That is a very big thing. God predicts that His people will truly be His and belong to Him and be close to Him and know Him as Jeremiah predicts. They will not just know the rules; they will have the rules right on their hearts. "They will know Me and My covenant. They will know me internally." That is what the Holy Spirit does.

D. Restoration only begun by return to homeland

Finally, the opportunity to return to a homeland has occurred but it is still not everything that will happen. It is just opening up the beginning of the restoration. Israel still has much to anticipate in Malachi's day. My point here can be summarized this way—when the prophetic canon closes with Malachi, the last prophet, some things are just great, but many things have not gone far yet. That is what Daniel said, that is what Ezekiel said, and that is what Zechariah said would be the case. It will not happen instantly. "Don't naively expect," they said, "that everything will go smoothly once you finish building the temple and all your worries are over." "That is not what I mean," says the Lord. "I will come back to you and will begin the process but it is going to be a long, slow process and many things will come much later." That is where Malachi leaves us, in effect.

III. Orienting Data for Malachi

Let me start with some brief orienting data for Malachi.

A. Content

Judgments, warnings, and promise.

B. Date

When does he preach? Right before Ezra arrives. Ezra comes in 458 BC, Malachi apparently is preaching in 460 just before he comes. We cannot prove it down to the date but it is a pretty good possibility.

C. Emphases

What is his emphasis?

1. Obedience to covenant law which needs to happen because, unfortunately, there is such moral and religious decline in Judah.
2. The promise of the Messiah.

D. Disputation Style

One of the things that happens in Malachi to convey all of this information is Malachi's disputation style. Let me explain what we mean by those disputations. After the brief superscription, the brief title, we encounter this in Malachi. First a disputation against Edom. Then another one against the Jerusalem priests. Then another one against the people of Judah. Another one against the people for their general unfaithfulness. Another one against the people for their unfaithfulness in not providing tithes and offerings. Then a final disputation because of their failure to fear and honor God. Here is the thing, here is how Malachi works. Let me read one disputation and in the process, I hope, answer the question for you that sometimes people ask about when they see it quoted in the Book of Romans but also give you a feel for the way the structure works. Malachi 1:2. "'I love you,' says the Lord. 'But you ask, 'How do you love us?'"

1. There is an assertion by God, "I love you."
2. Then there is an objection by the people, "What, how do you love us?" Assertion, objection.
3. Then there is a response. "'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' the Lord says. 'But I have loved Jacob and hated Esau. I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.' Edom may say, 'Well, we've been crushed but we're going to rebuild.' I say 'They may build, but I'll demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel!' So you have the assertion, the objection, and then the response and
4. The implication. Every one of these six disputations in Malachi works exactly the same way. God makes an assertion and the people object. This is Malachi's wording their objection for them, "This is the way you are thinking," is what he is saying. Then God responds to their objection. It is all rhetorical; it is a rhetorical device. Then he gives the implication. What is the implication? "You ain't seen nothing yet. With your own eyes, you are going to say 'Great is the Lord,' even beyond the borders of Israel. I have wonderful things ahead for you, My people." What were they worried about? We know that from the Book of Obadiah and from many other sources that the Edomites had been really very cruel in their day. The Edomites are the group that gets more oracles against foreign nations than any other group; the nation most often included in oracles against foreign nations is Edom, little, tiny Edom. Because they are so relentlessly hostile to the Israelites, always trying to grab Judah's high territory, and always trying to give them grief God says, "I'm going to eliminate them."

E. Language of Diplomacy: Love and Hate

A while back I showed a slide that talked about the language of the love, the meaning of love, love God with your whole heart. And I showed all those quotes of various kings who said love so and so with your whole heart or so and so does not love me anymore, he loves king so and so. The same is true with hate. Love and hate are the language of diplomacy. They are the language of international relations. In our day we say, "the United States has

treaty obligations with or a special relationship with or has as one of its historic allies the nation of....” That is the way we say it. In those days they very simply would say, “The United States loves Taiwan and hates mainland China.” That is the language they would use; they use love/hate language. It is the range of meaning. It sounds strange to us, it sounds weird, it sounds funny, but that is their standard way of doing it.

Of course when God says, “I love Israel and I hate Esau”, it does not mean that God is a selective, vicious, arbitrary and capricious God. He is saying, “Look, I have chosen you as My chosen people. I am your special ally and because of what they have done they are enemies of Mine.” That is all He is saying. He is reassuring the people. “Because of all the grief you have gotten from the Edomites, you need to hear this. You need to hear that the time is coming when they will be obliterated. It is not yet. They are going to rebuild and I am going to tear down. It is not yet but when it comes you will all see that there is no more Edom.” This did come.

A group called the Navatians were an Aramaic/Arab group and they simply conquered and effectively obliterated the Edomites who then married in with them and no longer became even an ethnic group, certainly no longer a political group. This happened after about 400 BC. Within a few decades that exactly did happen. So when Paul in the Book of Romans says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated,” he is not talking about the two brothers. He is talking about a quotation from the first disputation Malachi, he quotes it word-for-word. He is saying, “Look, this is what I can do. I am a chooser of a chosen people and because of that you can have confidence in me. I don’t choose everybody.” Paul’s big argument is that God chooses those on the basis of their faith in him. That is the criterion that he has always employed from Abraham on—“It’s faith, it’s faith, it’s faith,” Paul says as many different times as he can think to say it in the Book of Romans. But somehow people have tried to make that a case of individual election which Paul is actually not addressing at that point in the book. There is a question of individual election; that is a perfectly good question to ask. Just do not try to solve it by reference to the wrong passage not realizing that it is about nations rather than about individuals.

IV. Overview of Malachi

A very quick coverage, just an overview of Malachi. What is he concerned about?

A. Problems from enemies

B. The priesthood is corrupt

C. Divorce and remarriage

People are divorcing the “bride of their youth, the spouse of their youth.” It was the men who would do the divorcing. They are divorcing the “bride of your youth” or “wife of your youth,” meaning the one you married when you were young, and remarrying others. This was a problem. Malachi talked about it, but you will find both Ezra and Nehemiah also dealing with it because this was a big thing in that day. There were apparently enough situations of prosperity that people could practice the “trophy wife syndrome.” “I have made it now; I am going to divorce this person who has been with me all these years and marry some young Philistine chic.” That is what they did. God says, “No way, it is absolutely horrible.” This is one of the great passages of the Old Testament against what we call a “version divorce.” In other words, a divorce that is not legitimate. You can have a divorce for adultery and so on but this is a version divorce where you just get tired of your spouse and say, “Hey, it is not working out anymore. Let’s get divorced.” Very strong denouncing of that.

D. Not giving adequate tithes and offerings

They are also generally unrighteous and unjust. More specifically not giving adequate tithes and offerings. A great passage to preach when you are trying to help teach people about how they should give to God. A lot of people do not know anything. A new convert comes into your church and does not know anything. One of the

things they do not know is that it is a basic obligation to enjoy supporting God's work financially. You need to teach them that; you need to preach on those things. Many of them will get it. They will say, "I didn't realize that. Of course. If I give something on the order of ten percent that will be enough to shift my priorities," and it does. It is amazing how that works. If you have to set aside ten percent off the top for God it really is a constant reminder of what your financial priorities should be. Very powerful. Do not deny it to people. Do not say, "We are doing fine financially, I'm not going to preach about tithing." You are denying them the proper ordering of their financial relationships in this world. They will not get it unless they give enough. If they start giving enough, it will suddenly dawn on them where their money comes from. It is a great system.

E. Failure to fear and honor God

Finally, failure to fear and honor God. That is how the Old Testament ends. "Less I strike the earth with a curse." Which way will people go? What will happen?

V. Ezra and Nehemiah

After this come Ezra and Nehemiah. I am quickly going to give an overview of the two. We have already read some sections from Ezra. I am going to wind up with some comments about Nehemiah.

A. Ezra

1. Rebuilding of the temple

1 to 6 describes what happened between 538 and 458. That is the initial rebuilding attempt, the long hiatus because of the opposition and then finally the successful building.

2. Ezra arrives and Jerusalem is still uninhabitable.

In chapter 7, as I said, Ezra shows up. This is 458 BC now. By the time he arrives, Jerusalem is still in ruins. This is most interesting. You know after a war any city may lie in ruins for a year or two and then the rebuilding commences and so on. He comes back and he finds a city still uninhabitable. It is 130 years later and it is uninhabitable. Moreover it is morally decrepit.

3. Morally decrepit

It is not just physically a disaster with nobody living in the city except a few of the priests and families of Levites living up at the temple mount where they have cleared some land and built houses but rather it is also a moral situation. Ezra has to address this. What are the problems? There are several. One of them is intermarriage and another is divorce in their marriage, he has to address those, and he does it very strictly. He actually requires many of those people to send away their second spouse. That is not basically a recommended biblical solution. It is not generally the case. You go to somebody who has divorced and remarried and you say, "Okay, divorce again." In that particular case those marriages were not legal at all. There were no legal grounds for those marriages, they could not do that, they were forbidden to do it, they were illegal. Ezra's position is, "These marriages are illegal, we're not going to continue that, it is just like living in sin or anything else, and we are not going to allow it." These people are forced to send those second wives back to the Philistines or wherever they got them. It is a radical solution but Ezra is really worried that otherwise God's blessing will not be seen, just as Malachi is worried. They are all inspired by God to be worried but, speaking of it from a human point of view, they are worried that God may curse them all and cut them out of anything related to all these great new blessings of the restoration era. They do not want to miss God's blessing and they take it seriously.

B. Nehemiah

Parallel to Ezra is Nehemiah. Nehemiah returns only fourteen years after Ezra. Ezra came back as a priest, not obviously the high priest. He is a priest but he does not appear to be in the lineage of the high priestly family but he functions almost like a high priest. He is given great authority to do that.

1. Nehemiah as Governor

Nehemiah comes back as a governor. He is the governor of Judah as of 444 BC. They work together. It is very much like Zerubbabel and Joshua working together back in the days of Haggai and Zechariah. Now you have Nehemiah and Ezra working together, governor and priest, in the days of Malachi. He gets an appointment as governor.

2. Safety first

He looks first at the safety. Not because he is unconcerned about the matters of spirituality but because as governor that is his appropriate assignment; that is exactly right. He wants ultimately to make things right spiritually. He wants people to be back, to be correct with God, and the covenant enforced again. But he has got to get some things settled that are long undone including the fact that when he comes back another set of years has gone by and the city is still absolutely in ruins. First thing, get the walls rebuilt. If he can get the outside rebuilt, maybe you can start working on the inside. He finds plenty of problems.

3. Social injustice

Social injustice, people lending to each other at usurious interest rates, high interest rates, and so on, as the covenant forbids.

4. Threat of neighbors attacking

Threat of neighbors attacking. They do not want to see Jerusalem rebuilt. That is a hated, old city that was a city of oppression as far as they are concerned. There is even a very substantial assassination plot against Nehemiah himself that requires him to be very, very careful and fortunately he is able to escape that danger. Also he wants to get going in the second half of the book on proper worship.

5. Restore proper worship

As governor he handles the very important matter of getting the legitimate temple workers and priests all properly lined up. They want to do things right. They do not want to offend God anymore. They want to please God. They want to do it the way it should be done, decently and in order as the New Testament says. There is a lot of question in Malachi's day, obviously, about the priests. One of Malachi's disputations is against the priests for allowing poor quality animals to come in for sacrifice and so on.

The priests were supposed to reject any poor quality offering of any kind. They were supposed to examine every offering and see that it was good. It would be just like putting counterfeit money in the offering plate in church. What are you doing? Who is thinking that they are getting away with something? The priests did not do it. Why? Here is the deal. Suppose you are a priest. You should let in only unblemished lambs and goat kids. They should not have a broken leg or anything, they should not have an overbite or anything else that is improper. There are a lot of things to think about if you raise goats or sheep, as unfortunately I sometimes do. We have a couple of goats at home right now. There are all these things that make a goat or a sheep right and good for breeding and good for generation after generation, and if you see any of those weaknesses you really do not want to breed them. So the farmers would say, "Great. I will bring this goat in for sacrifice." Remember the deal is that the priest gets part of any offering. That was the temple system. You got most, some is given symbolically to God,

and the priest gets the rest. The priest gets part of any offering. So if the priest is strict, he says, "Wait a minute, let me check that goat." You can bring a goat with a broken leg, it would taste just as good, it is just as good a goat for eating, but God does not want the leftover stuff. He wants to teach His people that He comes first. That is the only way they will get it right and really focus on where their salvation comes from.

A really strict priest would reject a very great amount of what came his way. He would say, "Nope, sorry." He would make the parishioners mad. "Aw come on. The leg is still sort of wobbly, look, I'll make him walk. See how he can, kind of, limp on all three. It is just a sprain." "No, sorry." Or you would come in holding a goat with your hand over the wound. "How do you like this goat?" "Move your hand. No." A strict priest would not have as big of an income. He gets a cut. He will not get a cut of any animal that he rejects. What happened by Malachi's day is that the priests relaxed their standards down to nothing so the farmers brought in more stuff. The farmer says, "Great! I'm getting my quid pro quo from Yahweh. It is the old idolatry mentality creeping back in, the more I sacrifice, the more He will bless me. The farmer thinks he has got a good deal. Furthermore, he is getting rid of bad animals that he cannot breed anyway so it is not much of a loss. The priest gets a much bigger share and can feed his family very nicely. So it is a great system but with one flaw; God does not like it.

Like so many systems of worship and the way church is run and so on; everybody loves it except God. That is the real question you have to ask. Is my church growing? The question is why is it growing. Is it because we offer pizza with every worship service? Is that what we have done as a gimmick? Is God pleased? That is really the question. So much of church growth theory, so much of what certain pastors are running around the country saying, "I got a method and it will work for you." Almost nowhere in there is the statement, "We first try to please God." Almost always it is, "Hey, here is the method. It worked for us. Built our church up. You ought to use it." That is going on in that day as well. A lot of problems. Nehemiah is trying to counter it by reestablishing legitimacy even among the temple workers and priests. Get out some of these characters who are allowing the corruption in the worship system.

6. Covenant renewal

Nehemiah and Ezra gang up together and have a great covenant renewal. It is a wonderful story of covenant renewal starting in chapter 8. Ezra preaches the word and Nehemiah is there with a lot of leaders and they get the people, they translate it for the ones who do not know Hebrew much anymore, plenty of those around and so on.

7. Resettling Jerusalem

He actually resettles Jerusalem. They have sort of a lot system so that one out of ten people draw a lot and have to move into Jerusalem and they begin to repopulate it because nobody wanted to do all the work of fixing up the ruined houses and rebuilding so they enforce it. They make it happen.

8. Problem with intermarriage again

At the end of the book there are still serious problems. Nehemiah has to beat people and pull their hair out because, once again, even since the reform just a decade and a half earlier of Ezra, marrying foreigners and bringing them into Jerusalem with all of the problems that represents. Remember now that religious intermarriage is the problem. It is not ethnic. It is not a question of the fact that these people are from a different ethnic group. That is not it at all. The problem is that they believe something different and thus the great burden, the great urgency to get God's people back is threatened every time some foreign idolater is brought into the home. Who is brought in? It is the women. The men stay put, the women leave their homes and come live with the men so, of course, the problem is going to be men marrying foreign women because it is the women who move. When they come from these Philistine places they bring with them all of their idolatrous beliefs and practices and as a result they threaten once again to pollute the religion of Israel and to cause all of the curses to come back upon them. It is a very deep concern. Not that you are marrying someone who is not ethnically Jewish,

but that you are marrying someone who will bring idolatry back into Israel. That is the great threat. The challenge is always religious intermarriage; the challenge is never ethnic intermarriage per say.