

ASSIGNMENT 3 & 4

NOTES

The Divided Kingdoms, 926-621 B.C. (Israel) and 926-586 B.C. (Judah)

The period of the Divided Kingdoms is tremendously important. Each of the two separate small kingdoms finally succumbed to outside attack and invasion. The prophets could foresee this — not because they were in the predicting business (they were NOT) but because a clear-eyed look at Israel and Judah disclosed that they had lost their spiritual and moral vitality; indeed, they had broken the covenant with Yahweh, failed to keep the stipulations of the Decalogue, and were about to lose their promised land unless they changed their ways. The prophets did their best to awaken, stir, persuade, threaten the people, explaining God's "controversy" ("lawsuit" in Hebrew) with His people and the prospective downfall as His punishment, the foreign powers His tools to bring about His purposes in history.

When a strong world power like Assyria moved, a tiny state like Israel had little chance of survival, particularly when it was like a "basket of summer fruit," as Amos said (in our terms "rotten at the core"!), and had been known to enter an alliance against Assyria. Later Judah, too, fell — to the Babylonians, who had then replaced Assyria as the great world power of the Middle East.

However, even as all this was happening, the prophets reminded the people of their great moral and spiritual foundations, presenting in vivid pictures the state of the nations (themselves and the other countries), describing the downfall that was inevitable if Israel and Judah did not change their (evil) ways, and then, beyond the downfall, painting a bright promise to the "remnant" that would be saved. The prophets were spokesmen for God to His people, clear-sighted, uncompromising, courageous, inspired, tremendous men.

Readings

Highlights in Israel, 926-721 B.C.

- Jeroboam I started dangerous precedents.....I Kings 12:25-35
- Omri built Samaria, was succeeded by Ahab.....I Kings 16:23-33
- Elijah and Elisha.....I Kings 17 to II Kings 13
- Amos:the book of Amos
(Jeroboam II, II Kings 14:23-29)
- Hosea:the book of Hosea
- The end of Israel, 721 B.C.....II Kings 17 (Here Samaria became
a "mixed" culture.)

Highlights in Judah, 926-586 B.C.

- JehoshaphatII Kings 3:6-27; II Chronicles 17-20
- Isaiah:*excerpts only* from the book of Isaiah
 - a. *Isaiah's Call and conditions in Judah*.....Isaiah: 6; 1; 3:16 to 4:1; 5:1-7, 20-25
 - b. *Foreign Affairs*
 - The Syrian-Israelite coalition against Assyria, 735 B.C. Ahaz of Judah threatened by the coalition.....II Kings 15:29, 37
 - Isaiah's counsel to Ahaz.....Isaiah 7:1 to 8:18
 - Ahaz' plea for help from Assyria and position as an Assyrian "satellite"II Kings 16:5-17
 - Revolts involving Judah against Assyria with BabyloniaIsaiah 39
 - with Egypt.....Isaiah 30:1-17; 31:1-3

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Isaiah warned against revolt.....	Isaiah 20
Assyrian punitive campaigns against Judah 701 B.C. (46 cities of Judah taken)	II Kings 18:13-16
688 B.C.	Isaiah 36; 37; 10:24-27; 26:1-4; Psalms 46; Isaiah 29:5-8 (Jerusalem saved); 31:4-9.
c. <i>Isaiah's Concepts of Messiah and Zion</i> (Kingdom of God)	
	Isaiah 2:1-5 (cf. Micah 4:1-5); 9:2-7; 11:1-9; 33:20-24; 35:3-10
Micah: (a contemporary of Isaiah)	the book of Micah
Jeremiah:	<i>excerpts only</i> from book of Jeremiah
a. <i>Before the Exile</i>	
Jeremiah's call (626 B.C.) and early teaching..	Jeremiah 1; 2
King Josiah's reform movement and the D document, 622 B.C.....	II Kings 22:3-23; 25; II Chronicles 34:1 to 35:19; Deuteronomy
Speech at the Temple and Jeremiah's escape...	Jeremiah 26:1-7; 7; 26:8-24
Book read: King Jehoiakim's response.....	Jeremiah 36
God's punishment.....	Jeremiah 25:1-16
In the stocks.....	Jeremiah 20
b. <i>The First Captivity, 598/7 B.C.</i>	
Jehoiachin, young king, taken to Babylon.....	II Kings 24
The figs	Jeremiah 24
Jeremiah's letter to the captives.....	Jeremiah 29:1-14
Jeremiah opposed to rebellion against Babylonia...	Jeremiah 27:12 to 28:17
In the dungeon.....	Jeremiah 38
c. <i>The Destruction of Jerusalem</i>	
Jeremiah's purchase of land.....	Jeremiah 32
Nebuchadnezzar's invasion	Jeremiah 39 — (587/6 B.C.)
Restoration	Jeremiah 23:1-9; 30:1-3, 8-11; 31:1-26
The New Covenant.....	Jeremiah 31:27-34

Questions and topics for discussion

- What conditions did Elijah face and how did he meet them? What GREAT concepts of God did he have or gain?
- What proofs did Elisha give of God's available power and presence? With Elijah and Elisha we have a clustering of demonstrations of God's power such as we do not find again in the Bible until Christ Jesus. (Whom did Jesus commune with at the Mount of Transfiguration? — Moses and Elias [Elijah].) A great conjunction of the law and the prophets and the Christ, the Bible epitomized.
- In his strong preaching of God as justice (demanding ethical conduct even of "foreign" nations but especially of Israel) and as a punishing God, do you see Amos' plumb-line as a symbol of God as Principle? What specific conditions of Judah does Amos portray vividly?
- Hosea evidently drew upon his own tragic domestic experience in presenting the infidelity of Israel to its marriage relationship to God. To Hosea God was Love. Did he have other symbols for God as Love? (Note the "controversy" (lawsuit) of God in 4:1-4.)
- Pause and listen to the rhythms of the prophetic language. Visualize the conditions as the prophets described them. Feel the power of their utterances.
- Note the relationships with other people (Syrians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians). Isaiah and Jeremiah saw God as using foreign powers as instruments of His purpose for His people. Can you find these passages? As a matter of fact, Isaiah believed that Assyria became arrogant and having served as a "rod of indignation against an hypocritical nation" had to be put in its place subordinate to Yahweh, as in Isaiah 10:5-19.

• Both Hezekiah (in Isaiah's time) and Josiah (in Jeremiah's) instituted reforms in worship and managed to reclaim northern territory (Israel). From what the prophets say, do you see the need for religious reforms? In Josiah's time, the discovery of a great book of the law (presumably Deuteronomy) in the temple stimulated the reform movement. Jeremiah evidently felt that reforms should go to the heart, beyond the outer forms of worship.

• Jeremiah gives more biographical material than any other prophetic book. This giant of a prophet deserves a study by himself (to be sure, Amos and Hosea and Isaiah do, too!). You can see clearly what he faced (compare his call with Isaiah's), and how he felt when the going became rough, how faithful he was and how convinced of God's righteousness, love, and power.

ASSIGNMENT 5

The Babylonian Exile, 586-538 B.C.

The first group taken into exile included among the 10,000 captives the prophet Ezekiel, the young king Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah), many soldiers (to weaken Judah), and many able people whom Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon could use in the administration of his realm and as artisans. The second group (586) experienced cruelty. Psalms 137 and *Lamentations* reflect these events. The exile was a period of hard thinking: Yahweh had meant what the prophets had said He did: their violating the Covenant had resulted in the end of Judah. In a time of remembering, collecting traditions and manuscripts and writing, the exiles listened to Ezekiel and the Unknown Prophet, who underlined the lessons of the past and gave a new hope.

Readings

Excerpts from Ezekiel

- The call of the prophet: 1-3
- Principle of individual responsibility: 18
- Shepherds (indictment of poor leadership and followership in Judah): 34
- Valley of dry bones: 37:1-14 (the way to revive a dead nation!)
- The temple: 43:1-12; 47:1-12 (perhaps as a member of a priestly family, Ezekiel directed the thought of the exiles to the temple and to true worship as the center of re-building and restoration).

The "unknown prophet" Isaiah 40-55 or 40-66 (depending on the scholar!)

- Historical setting: 44:24 to 45:6
- Many familiar themes in lyric, poetic language: the infinitude of God and His Creation, man as His witness, the "servant" concept applying perhaps both to the Messiah and to Israel, this group, (Jesus, in Luke 4 quotes Isaiah 61:1-3), the idea of rebuilding the "old wastes," of being a "light to the Gentiles," of "a new heaven and a new earth."