

## Approach to the Old Testament Prophets

Hebrews 1:1-3 The Old Testament prophets served a primary and vital part of God's overarching plan for history and eternity – the revelation of Himself.

### Why should I be interested in the prophetic books?

- Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 10:11 For our learning
- John 5:39, Luke 24:27 They testify of Christ.
- Deeper understanding of God and His ways and of His presence in history.
- A casual reading will likely produce boredom and frustration. A deeper study will produce appreciation and delight in God.

### What is a prophet?

- An individual on whom the Spirit of God rested (Numbers 11:17-29) and to whom God appeared and spoke directly.
- Selected by God as His spokesman or mouth piece to His people. Exodus 4:15,16; Exodus 7:1,2 Moses stands in relation to Pharaoh and Israel as God.
- Prophets called to communicate God's message, not interpret. Deuteronomy 18:18
- God's message included both forth telling (speaking truth) and foretelling (speaking of future occurrences).
- Prophets were mediators between God and man. Deuteronomy 18:15-18
- Priests represented the people to God through sacrifice and offerings; the prophets represented God to the people, keeping watch over them.
- Prophets were limited to speaking only what God had actually said. Deuteronomy 18:20
- God established safeguards for discerning true and false prophets. Deuteronomy 18:21,22
- The prophet was not a disinterested messenger; as a part of the audience, he was invested in the welfare of the audience.
- Jesus Christ is the final, promised, and perfect prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15; Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 6:14; Acts 3:22

### Where do the prophets fit into Old Testament history? (Historical Context is Key to Message)

- History of Israel from Moses to Solomon is recorded from Exodus to I Kings 11 and II Chronicles 9. After Solomon's death, Israel split in two, the ten tribes known as Israel and the remaining two as Judah.
- The books from Isaiah to Malachi are commonly called the writing prophets, or the 5 major (longer) and 12 minor (shorter) prophets.
- The approximate historical period of the writing prophets is II Kings, II Chronicles 9-36, and Ezra and Nehemiah.
- Another method of dividing the writing prophets:
  - Prophets to Israel – Jonah, Amos, and Hosea
  - Prophets to Judah – Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk
  - Exilic Prophets – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
  - Post-exilic prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

### Why is it important to understand the historical context?

- The first and primary application was to that specific audience. The message cannot be understood without understanding the setting.
- The Bible is not just a random collection of holy writings and spoken truisms, but is the revelation of God, most notably His redemptive purpose. This is only seen in the redemptive-historical context of Scripture. II Kings – Sin leads to exile, Ezra and Nehemiah – Restoration from Exile. The writing prophets are describing the death and resurrection of the nation of Israel. This redemptive theme (Creation, fall, sin, death, redemption, recreation) is repeated throughout Biblical history and finally culminates in Jesus Christ.

### **What should I understand about prophetic writing to better understand it?**

- **Writing Style**
  - Poetic speeches with figurative language, striking imagery, and metaphors
- **Speaker**
  - Oracles of God
  - Reflections of the Prophet
    - On God's message
    - On state of nation
  - Dialogue between God and the prophet
- **Common Message**
  - The redemptive narrative will always be the dominant theme
    - Condemnation of nation breaking God's covenant
    - Promised judgment – intended to produce repentance
    - Condemnation of the heathen nations – Redemption through destroying evil
    - Promises of blessings – Due to sovereign commitment of God to bless despite His people deserving judgment
      - Temporal deliverance
      - Promise of coming salvation and the kingdom of God through Messiah

### **How do I approach studying a particular prophetic book?**

- Research the historical context of the prophecy. Some are obvious (Micah 1:1) while others are more obscure (Habakkuk).
- Learn about the prophet himself. Some are well chronicled (Jeremiah); some are not (Habakkuk); for some, God used the events of their lives, not just their speeches, as a living metaphor, or visual aid, of His message (Hosea, Ezekiel).
- Bracket the dialogue. You will never understand the message unless you understand who is speaking.
- Discern who the audience is in each part of the message. For example, sometimes God is speaking to His people (Judah, Israel) while at others He speaks to the heathen nations.
- Discover the theme of the message. In the shorter prophecies, there will usually be one particular theme. In the longer books, there will be multiple themes.
- After discovering the theme, read the book again while relating what you read to the theme. This will be especially helpful in Habakkuk.
- Look for the redemptive narrative (Sin, Judgment, Restoration) in the book.
- Seek to relate the similarities of Israel and Judah to our modern times.
- Seek to understand God's seriousness about His covenant.
- Look for any Messianic prophecies.

- Hold loosely to any opinions you arrive at regarding future things. If the New Testament expressly confirms your opinion, hold tight to it. If it doesn't, hold very loosely to it.

#### **What is the general historical context of the writing prophets?**

- 400 year period marked by three things: 1) political, social, economic, and military upheaval, 2) Rebellion by Israel and Judah, and 3) Dramatic changes to national boundaries
- Israel was a permanently divided nation. Israel known as Northern Kingdom and Judah as Southern Kingdom.
- After Solomon, Israel never had a king who sought after God.
- In 722 BC, Assyria conquered Israel by taking the capital city of Samaria.
- Judah witness the downfall of Israel, and the prophets continually warned Judah that the same would happen unless there was repentance.
- A new superpower, Babylon, arose, defeating the Assyrians in 612 BC and Egypt in 605.
- Three assaults by Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon upon Judah – 605 Daniel and others taken to Babylon, 597 Nebuchadnezzar stops a rebellion, and finally in 586 BC Jerusalem is destroyed
- After 70 years, there is a return to Jerusalem under authority of Cyrus. This is chronicled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

#### **What is the historical context of Habakkuk?**

- Very little is known of the man Habakkuk. As opposed to other prophets, the message God delivered through him is understood without a need to know the man himself.
- His name seems to coincide importantly with the specific message God gave him. His name means “struggler” and “embracer.”
- Habakkuk was clearly invested heavily in the welfare of Judah and in the glory of God.
- Habakkuk prophesied to Judah prior to the fall of Jerusalem.
- Very likely, he prophesied during the reign of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, around 610 BC. II Kings 23:31-24:20; II Chronicles 36:1-8; Jeremiah 26. He would have been a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and perhaps Ezekiel and Obadiah.

#### **Helpful Hint**

- Theme verse of Habakkuk is in chapter 2, somewhere between verses 3 and 5.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

of the kings of Judah and Israel subsequent to the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, each of which lasted forty years; from B.C. 1095 to B.C. 975. (*After Ussher.*)

|                      | Length of reign<br>in years | Kings of<br>JUDAH                 | B.C. | Kings of<br>ISRAEL | Length of reign<br>in years |                |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
|                      | 17                          | Rehoboam                          | 975  | Jeroboam I         | 22                          |                |
|                      | 3                           | Abijah                            | 958  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 41                          | Asa                               | 955  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 954  | Nadab              | 2                           |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 953  | Baasha             | 24                          |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 930  | Elah               | 2                           |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 929  | Zimri              | Seven days                  |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 929  | Omri               | 12                          |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 918  | Ahab               | 22                          |                |
|                      | 25                          | Jehoshaphat                       | 914  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 897  | Ahaziah            | 2                           | Elijah         |
|                      |                             |                                   | 996  | Jehoram            | 12                          |                |
|                      | 8                           | Jehoram                           | 891  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 1                           | Ahaziah                           | 885  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 6                           | (Athaliah)                        | 884  | Jehu               | 28                          | Elisha         |
|                      | 40                          | Jehoash                           | 878  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 856  | Jehoahaz           | 17                          |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 841  | Jehoash            | 16                          | Jonah          |
|                      | 29                          | Amaziah                           | 839  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 825  | Jeroboam II        | 41                          |                |
|                      | 52                          | Uzziah                            | 810  |                    |                             |                |
| Joel                 |                             |                                   | 773  | Zachariah          | Six months                  | Amos           |
|                      |                             |                                   | 772  | Shallum            | One month                   |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 772  | Menaham            | 10                          |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 761  | Pekahiah           | 2                           |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 759  | Pekah              | 20                          | Hosea          |
|                      |                             | Jotham                            | 758  |                    |                             |                |
| Isaiah               | 16                          | Ahaz                              | 742  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 16                          | (Interregnum of 5 or more years.) | 730* | Hoshea             | 9                           |                |
|                      | 29                          | Hezekiah                          | 727  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 721  |                    |                             | Samaria taken. |
| Nahum                | 55                          | Manasseh                          | 698  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 2                           | Amon                              | 643  |                    |                             |                |
| Zephaniah & Habbakuk | 31                          | Josiah                            | 641  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 3 months                    | Jehoahaz                          | 610  |                    |                             |                |
| Jeremiah             | 11                          | Jehoiakim                         | 610  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 3 months                    | Jehoiachin                        | 599  |                    |                             |                |
|                      | 11                          | Zedekiah                          | 599  |                    |                             |                |
| Obadiah              |                             |                                   | 588  |                    |                             |                |
| Ezekiel              |                             |                                   | 588  |                    |                             |                |
| Daniel               |                             | Jerusalem taken.                  | or   |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 587  |                    |                             |                |
|                      |                             |                                   | 536  |                    |                             |                |
| Haggai & Zechariah   |                             |                                   |      |                    |                             |                |
| Malachi              |                             |                                   | 400  |                    |                             |                |

\*Five or more years should be, from here, added to these dates of Ussher's.