



OT Survey. Lesson 9.

The Prophets of the Assyrian Period.

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Time of the Classical Prophets of Israel/Judah. The Written Prophets.

Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Isaiah, Micah

The Assyrian Empire

According to Amos 1:1, Amos prophesied during the days of Uzziah, king of Judah (783-742) and Jeroboam II king of Israel (786-746). The book focuses on one great message, which Amos delivered about 750 BC.

Let's take a moment and explore the history of the Assyrian Empire.

As early as the twelfth century BC with **Tiglath-pileser I** (1114–1076 BC), the lion of Assyria tried to overtake the area of Israel. His forces moved as far as the mountains of Lebanon before they had to return home because of a lack of clear political and military conception.

From 858-824, **Shalmaneser III** came to the throne and continued Assyrian expansion and imperialism. **In 853 BC**, Shalmaneser III fought a coalition of Syrian minor princes who were led by **Ben-Hadad of Damascus and Ahab of Israel** in the **Battle of Qarqar**. Assyria lost this battle, but they fought again on Mt. Hermon in 841 BC and won, taking Syria captive and forcing **Jehu** of Israel to pay tribute.

Shalmaneser III was succeeded by **Adad-nirari III** (811-784 BC) who continued the Assyrian domination by completely crushing Damascus and by extracting tribute from Israel. **After Adad-nirari III, the Assyrian kingdom fell into weakness for the next fifty years.** This was partially due to a resurgence of the Babylonian empire and also a lack of leadership for the Assyrians. This time of weakness gave Syria and Israel a chance for renewal and prosperity. John Bright comments:

The eighth century brought a dramatic reversal of fortune, which projected Israel and Judah to heights of power and prosperity unknown since David and Solomon. This was due partly to the fact that both states were blessed with able rulers. But the chief reason lay in a happy turn of events of which Israel became the beneficiary.¹

This time of prosperity was short lived, and the Assyrian kingdom was to rise to great power once again.

When **Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC)** came to power in Assyria, he was determined to make the nation of Assyria dominant again. J. Alberto Soggin, an Old Testament scholar, writes of him stating, "After the start made by his predecessors, it was his lot to lead the Neo-Assyrian empire to the pinnacle of power and to bring it to its completion in concept and system if not in territory."²

The prophet Amos prophesied during the period of Assyrian weakness between the reigns of Adad-nirari III and Tiglath-Pileser III. This was a time of great prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Jehoash (804-788) and **Jeroboam II** were able to secure for Israel a supremacy in Northern Palestine and Syria. This age has been called "**the Victorian Age of the Hebrew kingdoms.**"³ Jeroboam II extended the boundary of Israel and created revenue by placing customhouses at every port and mountain post of his region. The natural trade route controlled by Israel brought both merchants and money to the capital city, Samaria. The rich began to become more and more hungry for increased wealth and power. The common man began to be disregarded and then to be abused by the rising upper classes. **Norman Snaith**, an Old Testament scholar, characterizes this period by writing:

We have, therefore, a country with great scarcity and poverty in the midst of plenty, a state of society in which the rich grow steadily richer and more luxurious in their tastes, whilst the poor become even poorer until they lack even the necessities of life. The country was ripe for civil strife.⁴

It was into such civil and social crises that Yahweh called Amos to prophesy. Amos was commissioned to take an unwanted and unpopular message to an unsympathetic and uncaring audience.

¹ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p. 252.

² J. Alberto Soggin, "The Davidic-Solomonic Kingdom," *Israelite and Judean History*, Eds. John H. Hayes and Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 417.

³ George W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction of the Old Testament* (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co, Ltd., 1959), p. 150.

⁴ Norman H. Snaith, *The Book of Amos*, vol. I (London: The Epworth Press, 1945), p. 15.

Amos--The Prophet of Social Justice

But let justice roll on like a river; righteousness like a never-failing stream.

—Amos 5:24

1. Title:

The name Amos means "burden-bearer," or it could be shortened to mean "borne by God."⁵

2. Author:

Amos is placed professionally in the town of Tekoa. It is located around five miles south of Bethlehem. It is upon this hill of Tekoa that Amos lived and worked.

Amos was a shepherd and a keeper of sycamore trees. As a shepherd, Amos raised a special breed of sheep of small and stunted growth that were prized on account of their wool. It is possible that the reference of Amos 7:14 means that Amos was also a cattle herdsman.

Besides being a shepherd, Amos was also the keeper of sycamore trees. The sycamore, a wild fig tree, which needed to be nipped or cut at the tip in order to allow its sap to run. If it was nipped at the proper season, then an edible fruit would be produced which the lower classes could afford.

Amos was an ordinary man. Yet God took this shepherd and sycamore tree pincher and made him the great prophet of social justice.

3. Date/History.

See above.

4. Major Themes:

A. The Purpose: Amos spoke to show Israel's accountability to the Sovereign Lord for her gross violation of his holy covenant. Not the sham and pretense of empty formalism, but genuine justice and national righteousness was the Lord's demand (Amos 5:24).

B. Theme: Israel must fall because of her sinfulness.

⁵ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 316.

C. The God of Israel is the Lord of Creation.

The book of Amos declares the universal sovereignty of God. Yahweh rules over the cosmos and everything in it. This is a major theme of the OT. Although the gods of Canaan claimed to control the forces of nature, Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the real moving force behind the cycle of nature. He was the one who caused the sun to rise and set. Yahweh brought rain in time of drought and produced fruit for the harvest. He allowed nations to rise and fall according to his purpose. He controlled the destiny of Israel's neighbors and the destiny of Israel herself.

God's sovereignty was not just over the nations, but also over the individual. Since Yahweh is Sovereign, no one can escape his presence. **Amos 9:2-3** states:

Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them (NIV).

No person and no nation can hide from God. Israel, herself could not hide from God. As God would punish other nations for their sins, so Israel must be judged for her sins. And Yahweh who judged her is an inescapable judge. His sovereignty is universal.

Amos recognized the universal sovereignty of Yahweh. He extolled this characteristic of God in psalms. He communicated this idea in his oracles. His desire was for Israel to recognize this quality in God and for her to respond accordingly.

D. The God of Creation has entered into a special covenant relationship with Israel.

Amos declares in **Amos 3:2**:

“You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins” (NIV).

Israel enjoyed a unique relationship with God, but with this unique relationship came unique responsibilities. If Israel failed to recognize her special position, then her judgment would be even more severe.

Amos lashes out at Israel because of her moral laxity. She has forgotten God and lost her integrity. God becomes Israel's enemy because the Israelites became enemies of each other. George L. Robinson, who has written a classic on the Minor Prophets, notes the charges that Amos levels against Israel as follows:

Wealth and luxury, frivolity and corruption, opulence and oppression, summer and winter palaces, ivory couches, songs of revelry and wine,...victimizing the poor, confiscating their garments for debt, unbridled licentiousness even under the cloak of religion, hypocritical tithing, and hollow Sabbath-observance, even pilgrimages to far distant shrines.⁶

Amos' indictment against Israel was harsh and scathing. He deeply realized Israel's need for repentance.

Amos desired for the nation to return to God's standard of righteousness and justice. People must forget their individual pursuits and remember community. It was not feast and festivals, sacrifices and libations which gave Israel her relationship with God. Instead God sought moral obedience from his people, and this response was demanded of them if they wished to survive.

E. *Yom Yahweh*--The Day of the Lord is not a day of hope but a day of judgment.

If we were to sum up the message of Amos into one capsule phrase, that phrase would be, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:12).

This phrase is closely associated with the interpretation Amos gives to *Yom Yahweh*, the Day of the Lord. It seems this festive day was celebrated each fall during the covenant festival at the turn of the year. The Day of the Lord was hoped to be a day of salvation for the national cultus of Israel, but Amos twists this concept in his usage by giving it an idea of judgment (Amos 5:18-20). The concept comes from the idea that a truly powerful king would finish his wars in one day. Thus the idea for Israel was that God would come and defeat the enemies of Israel in one day. But Amos turns this idea on its ear. The people should no longer hope for the Day of Yahweh because it will be the day of Israel's demise. Israel is headed for a rendezvous with God. Israel had strayed long enough; it was now time for her to face judgment. Her people failed to administer justice in court; bribery was an accepted practice; dishonesty in business was the order of the day; great zeal was hypocritically shown in the religious rituals. For these transgressions and others, Israel is warned by Amos to prepare to meet God.

Even with this vehement message of doom, Amos was still hopeful that Israel would repent and return to the Lord. The meaning of repentance (*teshubah*) is to return to the one who gave you life. Although the situation was grave, there still remained a glimmer of hope:

Seek good and not evil so that you may live,
and that Yahweh, God of Sabaoth,
may really be with you

⁶ George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (New York: George H. Coran Company, 1926), p. 52.

as you claim he is.

Hate evil, love good,
maintain justice at the city gate,
and it may be that Yahweh, God of Sabaoth,
will take pity
on the remnant of Joseph.

--Amos 5:14-15, (*Jerusalem Bible*)

Amos confirmed to Israel that today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow might be too late. The only hope for Israel was to immediately repent and seek God.

F. Prophet of Social Justice.

The prophet Amos was keenly aware of the social condition of Israel in the seventh century BC. He boldly spoke against the social atrocities which were going on around him. In doing this he continued the legacy of Elijah and Elisha who had championed the cause of the poor and the outcast. As his predecessors, he stood against the established aristocracy and pleaded the cause of the individual. He recognized the rights given to the common person from the Torah. The Israelite state existed for the good of the individual and not the individual for the good of the state.

Hosea

HOSEA BEN BERI

THE PROPHET OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (NIV).

1. Title:

The Hebrew term is *Hoshea*, which means "salvation."

2. Author:

Almost nothing is known of Hosea apart from a few scattered references in the book of Hosea. His ministry took place during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah and during the reign of the Israelite king Jeroboam II and the six kings who followed him. He was a contemporary of Isaiah (1:1; cf. Isa. 1:1), and was witness with him of the collapse of the affluence and might of Israel into the hands of the Assyrians in 734-721 BC Like Amos before him, he had to face rejection because of his call (9:7-8).

The information we have about Hosea centers on his unhappy marriage and dismal family life. This information comes from two small collections. Chapter one, the first account, tells the story in the third person, just as much of Jeremiah's life is told by one of his friends. The other, briefer, and more poignant narrative--chapter three--are in the prophet's own words.

What information do we have? We know that Hosea was the son of an otherwise unknown and unidentifiable Beerli (1:1). Hosea was from Israel and his ministry probably was located in Samaria, the capital city, around the sanctuaries of Bethel and Gilgal. Hosea married a cult prostitute named Gomer, and together they had three children. It is uncertain whether or not the children were legitimately Hosea's; nevertheless, he accepted them and reared them as his own.

3. Date/History:

Hosea prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah (783-742), Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (735-715), and Hezekiah (715-687), kings of Judah (Hosea 1:1). He began his ministry while Jeroboam II occupied the throne in Samaria. Thus his work took place sometime in the period of 783-687, more concisely around 750-715 BC. Hosea was a contemporary of Micah and Isaiah.

After Amos, the situation in the Northern Kingdom grew progressively worse. Hosea's ministry parallels this time of decay. Hosea began his work around 750 BC, during the final years of Jeroboam II (786-746). Jeroboam II was the last of the strong leaders of Israel. After him six kings succeeded the throne during a 25 year span, but only one of these (Menahem) transmitted the kingship to his son. The theme of this period is conspiracy and murder.

This notorious time in Israel's history was the beginning of the end. The decline began when Zechariah succeeded the throne of Jeroboam in 746. Zechariah reigned only six months before he was assassinated by Shallum a rival army officer or royal official. Shallum was murdered within a month by Menahem (745-738) who was an extremely ruthless leader. 2 Kings 15:16 notes that Menahem attacked his own city of Tappuah killing the inhabitants, even ripping open the wombs of the women who were with child.

The Assyrian aggression was renewed with the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745 BC This king was aggressive and ambitious desiring to conquer lands and take enemies captive. Although Amos never named the specific threat to Israel's security, Hosea specifically mentioned that it was Assyria (7:11; 11:5; 14:3).

Menahem along with other kings from the land of Palestine were able to hold off Assyria by offering tribute.

In 738 Menahem's crown was passed to his son Pekahiah. Pekahiah did not wear the crown very long because Pekah (737-732) with the help of fifty soldiers was able to successfully gain control of the kingdom by a *coup d'etat*. In 734 Pekah joined forces with Rezin, the King of Damascus, and invaded Judah to attack King Ahaz. This attack was prompted because Ahaz would not join Pekah and Rezin in a coalition to attack Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria. This battle between Judah against the combined forces of Israel and Syria is known as the Syro-Ephraimitic War (II Kings 16:5-9). Ahaz made a brilliant move strategically by appealing to Tiglath-Pileser for help to subdue the aggressors.

When Tiglath-Pileser died in 727, Hoshea saw this as his chance to break away from Assyrian domination. He attempted to form an alliance with So, the king of Egypt, against the Assyrian forces. Hoshea did not count on the fortitude of Tiglath-Pileser's successor, Shalmaneser V. Hoshea was arrested by Shalmaneser V and the capital city Samaria was placed under siege for three years until it fell in 722/721 BC.

4. Major Themes:

(A) Hosea urged the nation of Israel to acknowledge its sinful condition and repent. Israel is pictured as a wife guilty of adultery, but God is like the loving and faithful husband. Hosea's family is used in an allegorical manner to portray the message of Yahweh. The relationship between Hosea and Gomer represents the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The book graphically illustrates Israel's rejection of Yahweh and points her toward repentance.

(B) Theme: Hosea has been called "the prophet of love." He might more-appropriately be called "the prophet of unconditional love." Through his own experience with unfaithful Gomer, he came to know the heartbreak that was God's. Hosea identified idolatry as spiritual adultery. In spite of Israel's spiritual prostitution, God still loved Israel with an unconditional love.

(C) Spiritual Adultery:

Hosea's relationship with Gomer established a basis for thinking of disloyalty to God as "spiritual adultery" (4:15-18; 5:4; 9:1). Israel's marriage relationship went back to a betrothal period in the wilderness of Sinai, but in Canaan she had gone after other lovers, the Baals. Before she could return to her husband, she must be taken back to the wilderness and reminded of her first love (2:14).

The fertility cults of Canaan negatively influenced Israel. Baal was worshipped as the god who controlled the weather, harvest, and fertility. Sexual activity was at the center of Baal's worship. Israel incorporated this into her worship and prostituted herself before God.

(D) Israel's religion has become corrupt.

Amos kept social injustice in the forefront of his criticism of the nation of Israel. Hosea focused on another downfall of Israel--her cultus. He not only exposed the religion of the present generation as ineffective, but brought to light the service of Baal hidden behind the service of Yahweh. Hosea branded this service as degenerate.

More than any other social group in the nation Hosea chastised the priests. They were the recipients of the Torah. It was their responsibility to convey God's knowledge to the people. Yet they had failed in their responsibility. The institution of cultic worship was flourishing, but the heart was absent was forgiving and his *hesed* flowed in an unconditional way toward Israel, did not mean there was no culpability for sin. Hosea taught that the penalty for sin must correspond to the offense. Since Israel had violated God in such a crass and horrific way, her penalty would be severe destruction and exile.

Unfortunately, Israel had to learn from her mistakes. Even though God had chosen her, freed her from slavery, made her into a nation, and promised her glory; she turned her back on him. God would punish her so she would seek him out in her distress. **Hosea 5:15** states:

“Yes, I am going to return to my dwelling place
until they confess their guilt and seek my face;
they will search for me in their misery” (J.B.).

(E) Yahweh's love is unconditional.

Hesed: *Hesed* was translated "loving kindness" by Coverdale (A.D. 1533) and Those who came after him, but it is also translated as "mercy". The term occurs five times in Hosea and is related to grace and loyalty (2:19; 4:1; 6:6; 10:12; 12:6). This word, implies covenant loyalty, and does not occur in Amos.

Hosea believed in the *hesed* of God. He experienced it in his own life and he saw it expressed in Israel's history.

Hosea had contributed greatly to our understanding of *hesed*. Outside of the example of the cross and God and his relationship to Israel, there is no greater example of unconditional love than the love of Hosea for Gomer. Hosea understood the Divine love of God for humanity because of his marriage.

Yahweh's *hesed* was seen in the fact that God chose Israel to be his people and not vice versa. Hosea portrayed this action by painting a sensitive vignette of Israel as God's son whom he caressed, fed, taught to walk only to see this son reject his love.

Jonah

JONAH BEN AMITTAI

THE PROPHET OF GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE

1. Title:

Meaning of Name: This book derives its name from the main character Yonah (Hebrew) or Ionas (Greek) which means "dove".

2. Author:

The only Old Testament reference to Jonah outside of the book which bears his name is found in 2 Kings 14:25. Here we learn that Jonah was from the town of Gath-Hepher, which was located a few miles north of Nazareth in the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. Gath-Hepher was a city of moderate size located within the tribal boundary of Zebulun.

Jonah was a contemporary of Jeroboam II (793-753), Amos, and Hosea.

Jonah was a nationalist. He was pro-Israel to the core. He loathed Assyria because of its power and its incessant desire to control Israel. As we understand Jonah, we get the picture that he opposed any person or any group that was an enemy of Israel.

From his work we can deduce that Jonah was a disciplined and dedicated prophet. As chapter two of his book attests, Jonah was a poet. He had an extremely rebellious and stubborn streak. This stubbornness was vented even against God.

Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh and to preach repentance in the name of Yahweh to that city. The capital of Assyria, Nineveh, laid 500 miles east of Palestine. When Jonah fled from God, most scholars believe that he was heading for Tartessus in Spain some 2,100 miles west of Palestine. Not only was Jonah heading in the opposite direction of Nineveh, he was attempting to place 2,500 miles between himself and Nineveh. Jonah embarked from Joppa, which was 50 miles from his hometown and the only harbor on the Palestinian coast below Mount Carmel.

3. Date/History:

Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. It had a rich history in the Middle Eastern world being already well established when Jonah visited it. The city reached its zenith under the reign of Sennacherib.

Today the ruins of Nineveh occupy two mounds in Iraq across the Tigris River from the modern city of Mosul. Quyundijiq is a mound, which runs about one mile long and 650 yards wide and 90 feet high. Alongside of Quyundijiq runs the much smaller mound Nebi Yunus. The mounds have been excavated for over 125 years -now although the excavation of Nebi Yunus is limited because it is the foundation of a Muslim cemetery. The wall surrounding the city is still visible and it runs for seven and one-half miles. From the wall it is one and one-half miles to the center of the city.

4. Major Themes:

A. Purpose: Though Jonah was a prophet to Israel, his book relates his mission to Assyria. The bigoted prophet declared a message of doom and destruction to the people of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital (Jonah 3:4). The book portrays the universality of God's love, even for the heathen nations. The book contains an eight-word message, "yet in 40 days Nineveh shall be destroyed."

B. With great skill the book of Jonah in four short chapters calls Israel to repentance and reminds her of her mission to preach to all the nations the breadth, length, and depth of God's mercy and forgiveness (Gen. 12:1-3; Is. 42:6-7, 49: 6).

C. God will go to great lengths to teach forgiveness.

The story of Jonah is not so much about the prophet Jonah, nor is it about the people of Nineveh. The main character in Jonah is God. Jonah is a passive instrument in God's. It is God who is the player--the active force throughout the book.

Jonah demonstrates the great lengths to which God will go to teach us the need to forgive. Jonah had the dubious distinction of being a prophet who wished that his message would go unheeded. He so hated for the Assyrians that he chose to disobey God rather than preach to his enemies. Yet God did not allow disobedience to stifle his message. He had to teach Jonah the importance of forgiveness.

God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. This fish was an instrument of God's discipline. Jonah was taught the sovereignty of God while he was in the belly of the great fish. He could not hide from God. No matter where he tried to flee, God would have been there waiting for him. Since God has divine authority over the world, does he not have the right to decide whom he will spare and whom he will destroy? If he spares Jonah in spite of his disobedience, should he not spare Nineveh when she repents?

Yet when Nineveh repented, Jonah despaired. He was so distraught that he wished to die. This is reminiscent of Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's threats after the Mount Carmel incident. After Carmel, how could Elijah doubt God? After the fish, how could Jonah doubt God? They doubted because they were weak, ordinary

people just like you and me. They did not understand the whole plan of God, and they believed their view of reality was superior to his.

God is the God of forgiveness. He taught Jonah the value of forgiveness. Jonah took great pleasure in a bush that grew up to shade him. When the plant died because of a worm, Jonah's bitterness increased. God rebuked Jonah saying, "What right do you have to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4, 9). Jonah had no right. He cared more about a common plant than about the 120,000 innocent people of Nineveh who knew neither right nor wrong.

God's compassion is contrasted with Jonah's hardness. God's forgiving nature is contrasted with Jonah's vengeful character. God went to great lengths to teach Jonah the value of forgiveness.

Isaiah

ISAIAH BEN AMOZ
THE PROPHET OF HOLINESS

Isaiah 6:3 "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

1. Title:

Meaning of Name: Isaiah means, "the Lord is Salvation."

2. Author:

Although the biographical facts about Isaiah are sketchy, there are some things we know of him. He was a native of the city of Jerusalem and the son of Amoz. Amoz seems to have been from an influential family in Jerusalem with some social and political standing. Since Isaiah's call in Isaiah 6:1-8 took place in the temple where only the priests were allowed to enter, it is safe to assume that Isaiah was a part of the priesthood and came from a family of priests.

His time of influence was lengthy. Isaiah 1:1 demonstrates that he served off and on for over 40 years under the reign of three different kings: Jotham (740-733), Ahaz (733-714), and Hezekiah (714-696). He was able to witness the Syro-Ephraimite War of 733, the fall of Samaria in 722, and the march of Assyria on Jerusalem in 710. He probably survived into the reign of Manasseh witnessing the death of Sennacherib in 681 BC. Tradition states that Isaiah was murdered by being cut in two during the bloody reign of Manasseh.

Isaiah was a prophet with a family. Although we rarely think of the prophets as being married and having children, Isaiah 8:3 mentions Isaiah's wife and child, "Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the

Lord said to me, name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." I We do not know the name of Isaiah's wife, but we know she was a prophetess. This might be the first mention of a "team ministry" in the scriptures. Isaiah and his wife were partners together in the same ministry.

Their choice of following God affected their children as well. Both of their sons were given symbolic names. The name of Isaiah's first son is Shear-Jashub which means "a remnant will return." At the Lord's direction he named his second son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz meaning "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." Isaiah knew that his children were to be dedicated to God. He saw himself and his children as instruments to be used by God. In 18:8 Isaiah states, "Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion."

Isaiah is also noted for having a group of disciples who congregated around him. He might have lead a prophetic school for young men and women (his wife might have taught also) to train them in the ministry. Isaiah 8:16 notes, "Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples."

Isaiah enjoyed more popularity at the court of King Hezekiah. Isaiah influenced Hezekiah in his reforms although the text does not tell us exactly how Isaiah responded to them.

3. Date/History:

Isaiah is a younger contemporary of the prophet Hosea and a contemporary of Micah in the Southern Kingdom. Isaiah prophesied during the last half of the eighth century BC Isaiah himself records his call as occurring in the year of Uzziah's death (740 BC).

Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham., Ahaz, and Hezekiah. His ministry began during the year that King Uzziah died. This would place the beginning of his work in 742 BC Since Isaiah records the death of Sennacherib of Assyria in Isaiah 37:37-38, we can assume he was martyred after his death in 681 BC Thus, Isaiah's ministry could have spanned over six decades.

Hezekiah, (715-697), came into power amidst a whirlwind which his father Ahaz had stirred. Yet Hezekiah gave his heart to God and with his strong leadership he attempted a reform of the political and religious climate in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32). He removed the pagan altars and idols from the temple area and returned to the more orthodox worship of Yahweh. He celebrated a Passover in Jerusalem which reminded the people of the days of Solomon. His reformation attempted to touch every area of Judean life and even reached beyond the borders of Judah to the ex-patriots of now fallen Samaria.

Isaiah 40-55.

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar deported to Babylon the best of the population of Judah. Once in exile, many Jews followed Jeremiah's advice and settled into the Babylonian community as best they could. Others separated themselves from their conquerors and lived in anticipation of the day in which they would return to their homeland. (Also see the historical sections of Jeremiah and Ezekiel for more information).

4. Major Themes:

A. Purpose: To prepare Judah for the coming judgment of God which would result in the devastation of Jerusalem and exile for its inhabitants. Isaiah also encourages his audience by looking beyond the judgment to a time when the exiles would return to Jerusalem.

B. Theme: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts."

C. Isaiah and Evangelism.

Isaiah understood that God was concerned with the totality of humanity and not just with his covenant people, Israel. Although Israel held a special relationship with Yahweh, and with that uniqueness came special privilege and special responsibility. Isaiah is one of the first evangelistic prophets. He speaks of God working through Israel to bring the whole world to salvation. God used both Israel and foreign nations as instruments to prepare people's hearts to know him and ultimately to receive his son into the world.

D. God is Faithful.

If God were to destroy Jerusalem, how would the Hebrew faith survive? Many critics of Isaiah asked this question. Isaiah responded by stressing God's faithfulness. God would punish Judah not because he was vindictive, but because of his love. He would not leave Judah in ruin. If God raised up Israel once, he could do so again. In fact, that is exactly what he would do. Jerusalem would rise out of her ashes to become a righteous city under the rule of a new king (1:26-27).

E. Isaiah 40-55: Good News for the Exiles.

The material found in these chapters was written with a view toward a time when the Jews of Jerusalem would be in exile. Isaiah tried to comfort those of Jerusalem (both those in the eighth century who like Isaiah accepted God's judgment upon Jerusalem and those in the sixth century who were in exile) by promising future glory to the city of Jerusalem. Despite opposition, God would bring his people back to the holy city (40:6-7).

The idea of the remnant of Israel is prevalent throughout these chapters (46:3). The concept of the remnant was introduced early in Isaiah through the name of his sons. Isaiah named one son "Quick-to-the-Plunder-Swift-to-the-Spoil" as a symbol of God's judgment upon Judah. But his brother was named ShearJashub, "A-Remnant-Will-Return, it as a symbol of God's lasting faithfulness to his people. Isaiah 10:20-23 and 11:11-16 also express the remnant motif.

God was doing this because he loved his people, but he had another agenda as well. Using language reminiscent of, Hosea, Isaiah prophesied, "For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called" (Isaiah 54:5).

How would God bring about this deliverance? He was the Holy One of Israel. He had acted in their behalf in the past and would do so again. Since he governed all of creation, he could certainly free Judah. He would choose an instrument from the nations around Babylon who would initiate the release of his people.

In 546 BC Cyrus rose to power in Persia. Isaiah had prophesied years earlier that he would be the anointed shepherd who would return the exiles to Jerusalem (41:2-5; 42:25; 44:28; 45:1-ff.; 46:11; 48:14-16). God worked through Cyrus to complete his dream for the people of Judah. The hope he instilled within Isaiah's heart two centuries earlier, now became reality.

F. Isaiah 56-66: Comfort for God's People.

Isaiah 56-66 manifests a different tone from the preceding chapters. When they reclaimed the Promised Land, they clung to much hope and great promises. Not all of these hopes were immediately realized. Many people in the post-exilic period suffered from a drought, which had stricken the land, enemies who did not welcome their return, and general conditions of poverty. They found that upon their return life was not rosy. Instead they had to work to rebuild life in Jerusalem.

Micah

MICAH OF MORESHETH
THE PROPHET OF THE POOR

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
--Micah 6:8, NIV

1. Title:

The name Micah is a shortened form of Micayaliu (cf. Judges 17:1, 4) and Micaiah (cf. I Kings 22:8) which means "Who is like Yahweh?"

2. Author:

Micah of Moresheth. Moresheth-Gath (Micah 1:14) was a small town about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem located in the lower Shephelah (the foothill country) of Judah. Micah's hometown was just 20 miles from Amos' birthplace, and this would help explain Amos' influence on Micah. Moresheth was situated on the main road between the Maritime plain and Egypt in the midst of very good farming land. This route served as a natural highway for the armies of Egypt to reach its enemies to the north and the east.

We know very little about the prophet Micah. Neither his occupation nor the name of his father is mentioned in the book. Like Nahum the Elkoshite and Amos from Tekoa, Micah of Moresheth was known from his hometown. This implies that he no longer lived in his home village, and the people of Jerusalem identified him as being from a small town.

Some scholars suggest that Micah was an "elder of Judah" who administered justice in his home village, others see military references in the book and suggest that he led the local militia in Moresheth. Micah likely was a farmer who became incensed at the treatment of his patriots to the point of taking up their cause by going to Jerusalem to prophesy. He connects with the sorrows and injustice experienced by the poor farmer, and he expressed indignation at their plight. He had little to say about the luxury and injustice of the big city though he did condemn it God's judgment.

3. Date/History:

Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (735-715), and Hezekiah (715-687), kings of Judah (1:1). Isaiah was active just prior to and during this time. Also, Micah was active just prior to, and somewhat after the fall of Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom (721 BC). Thus, he probably prophesied around 740-710 BC.

Micah 1:1 informs us that Micah's ministry spanned the reigns of three kings of Judah. These three kings, Jotham (742-735 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-687 BC) allow for a fifty five year period in which Micah could have prophesied. It is unlikely that Micah was active during the entire fifty-five years, and other events are mentioned that might narrow the time of his work.

Micah mentions Samaria (1:1, 6), idols, and Omri and Ahab (6:16) which lead us to believe that Micah began to prophesy before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC.

The earliest identifiable reference in Micah's work is the march of Sennacherib from Lachish to Jerusalem in 701 BC (Micah 1:10-16). This places Micah's work toward the end of the eighth century BC. Jeremiah mentions that Micah predicted the fall of Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah (715-687). Considering all these events, Micah's prophetic work could have taken place at least between the years 735 through 701, but he could have been active down through 687 BC.

Micah was able to witness the collapse of the Northern Kingdom into the hands of the Assyrians. He would have been familiar with the deportation of the Israelites to Assyria as the men and women were stripped naked and chained together often with a hook placed in their buttocks to keep them in place. He knew of the Assyrians' ruthless treatment of their captives and he feared this treatment for the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

After some time the Judeans grew tired of Assyria's taxes and sought a way to break free of her chains. Hezekiah, encouraged by Egypt, an enemy of Assyria, posed an insurrection around the year 705. At this time Sennacherib (705-681 BC), the king of Assyria, was challenged by a coalition of tribes led by Merodach-baladan. Merodach-baladan sought help from other countries to overthrow Sennacherib and the Assyrian power. Hezekiah seized this opportunity joining Tyre and Sidon in withholding tribute payments from Assyria. After Sennacherib had gained control of the eastern territories around Babylon, he turned his gaze west toward Judah.

After defeating the armies of Egypt and the Philistines, he defeated the city of Lachish and marched toward Jerusalem in 701 BC. 2 Kings 18-19 gives details about the Assyrian march on the capitol of Jerusalem. After gaining control of much of the countryside surrounding the capitol (Sennacherib boasted in his records of destroying forty-six Israelite cities in his march), Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem much like it had done to Samaria some 20 years earlier. This time Assyria was not as successful. King Hezekiah appealed to the prophet Isaiah for help to thwart the advance of their enemy. Isaiah assured Hezekiah that Jerusalem would not fall. 2 Kings 19:35-37 describes a sudden, massive destruction of the Assyrian forces surrounding Jerusalem. This could only be interpreted as God sparing Jerusalem from her enemies. Assyria lifted her siege of the city and returned home.

Micah noticed the same injustice in Judah that his fellow prophets, Amos and Hosea, had noticed in Samaria. Unlike Isaiah, he was a man of the country. He witnessed the burdens of the small farmer in the area of Moresheth-Gath.

Micah 3:1-3 states:

Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people, and their flesh from off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, and

flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a kettle like flesh in a cauldron. (NIV).

According to Jeremiah 26:18-ff. Micah's message against Jerusalem so moved King Hezekiah that he entreated the Lord to save Jerusalem. Hezekiah's reforms salvaged Jerusalem for a time, but ultimately this city had to face the penalty for her sins.

4. Major Themes:

A. Purpose. Micah warned of God's coming judgment. He also announced God's sure mercy in the realization of Israel's salvation after judgment.

B. Theme. Destruction of both Samaria and Jerusalem was imminent because of their sinful state.

C. Because of Judah's sin, Zion will be destroyed.

Micah 3:12 is the keystone and climax of Micah's message of doom. Micah was one of the first prophets to prophesy against Jerusalem. The mistaken consensus of the people was that they were safe because the Temple, and hence God's presence (3:11), was in their midst.

Micah pronounced judgment against Jerusalem because of her sin. Since she had rebelled against God, God would judge her. Her sins were many--idolatry (1:7; 5:12), murder (7:2), abuse of justice (2:1-2), stealing (6:11), lying (6:12), turning to the occult (5:12). Judah's judgment was related to her crimes against God's people. Because God was just, he sought justice.

Micah pronounced severe judgment against God's sacred city:

Therefore, on your account
Zion shall become a ploughed field,
Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
and the temple hill rough heath.

(Micah 3:12, NEB).

George L. Robinson sums up Micah's message in one sentence, "Those who live selfish and luxurious lives, even though they offer costly sacrifices, are vampires in the sight of God, sucking the life-blood of the poor."⁷

D. In the future God will glorify Zion (4:1-4).

⁷ George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (New York: George H. Coran Company, 1926), p. 97.

In this section Jerusalem's spiritual destiny is contrasted with her present prospects. Hope did exist for Judah, but it was a hope that was oriented to the future. After she had paid the price for her sin, God would once again bless Jerusalem.

Micah 4-5 and 7:7-20 detail the future glory of Israel. God would bring a purified remnant out of the fire of judgment. He would give Israel a new king to be born in Bethlehem from the line of the great King David. This king would reign in majesty receiving the blessing of God and blessing the people. God would give the nation greater glory and prosperity than she had ever known. In fact, many nations shall come, and say:

Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:2).

E. God's Demand (6:8).

Though the people multiplied sacrifices they failed to understand the true nature of God's demands. In reality, Yahweh wanted his people to "do justice, love kindness (i.e. steadfast love, covenant loyalty), and to walk humbly with their God." His main interest was in the heart, not the ritual. Compare I Samuel 15:22 which reads, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?"

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to hearken than the fat of rams."