

Session 4

God Speaks to Us

The Contents of the Bible

The following is a summary statement about the general contents of each book of the Old Testament.

THE OLD TESTAMENT (39 books)

- A. The Books of the Law (Books of Moses; the Pentateuch, the Torah) (5 books)
1. **Genesis** -
Chapters 1-11 The Beginnings
Chapters 12-50 The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph)
 2. **Exodus** -
Chapters 1-18 The Exodus from Egypt
Chapters 19-34 The Giving of the Law
Chapters 35-40 The Tabernacle
 3. **Leviticus** - The sacrificial system and rules for holy living
 4. **Numbers** - The Wilderness wanderings (40 years) between Sinai and the Plains of Moab before crossing the Jordan River
 5. **Deuteronomy** - Moses' three farewell speeches in which he reviews the people's history and the giving of the Law. He emphasizes God's love for the people and the necessity for their reciprocal love and obedience.
- B. The Books of History (12)
1. **Joshua** - The crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan
 2. **Judges** - After Joshua up to Samuel (about 300 years becoming established in the Promised Land.)
 3. **Ruth** - A good story during bad times (the difficult time of the judges)
 4. **1 Samuel** - The beginning of the kingdom (Samuel, Saul, David)
 5. **2 Samuel** - The reign of David
 - 6.&7.1 & **2 Kings** - Chapters 1-11 Solomon's reign
Chapters 12 - 22: the rest of the kings of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms; the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the exile.
 - 8.&9.1 & **2 Chronicles** Review of the kings of Judah only (southern kingdom)
 10. **Ezra** - Two returns from exile to Jerusalem and the re-building of the

temple.

11. **Nehemiah** - Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in spite of opposition.
12. **Esther** - A Jewish queen in a pagan court saves her people from annihilation.

C. The Books of Poetry (Wisdom Literature) (5)

1. **Job** - An epoch drama concerning the problem of evil and suffering
2. **Psalms** - The Hymn-book of Israel
Divided into five books, or rolls (scrolls): Psalm 1 – 41, Psalm 42 – 72, Psalm 73 – 89, Psalm 90 – 106, Psalm 107 - 150
1. **Proverbs** - Wisdom for daily living
2. **Ecclesiastes** - A pessimistic view of life
3. **Song of Songs** - A poetic view of human love and sexuality

D. The Prophets

A LIST OF PROPHETS

We cannot be certain about the exact order or dates for all of the prophets, but the following groupings may be helpful:

Early and non-writing prophets: **Moses** (Deut. 18:18), **Deborah** (Judges 4), **Samuel** (I Sam. 1-16:13), **David** (Acts 2:30), **Elijah** (I Kings 17-19, II Kings 1 & 2), **Michaiah** (I Kings 22:1-28), **Elisha** (I Kings 19:19-21; II Kings 2:1-9:13), **Hulda** (II Kings 22:14-20), etc.

Eighth century prophets: Jonah (God's mercy on Assyria), Amos (against Israel, hope for the future), Hosea (against Israel, hope for the future), Isaiah (against Judah with hope for the future through the coming Messiah), Micah (against Judah, with hope for the future), Joel (The Day of the Lord; coming judgment,)

Prophets of the end of the kingdom: Zephaniah (God's judgment on Judah and other nations), Jeremiah (judgment on Judah, Jeremiah's preaching), Ezekiel

Prophets of the exile and return: Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Prophets against foreign nations: Obadiah (Judgment on Edom), Nahum (Judgment on Assyria), Habakkuk (Judgment on Babylon after its conquest of Judah)

Historical summary of the exile and the return:

In **605** B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered the Assyrians and Egyptians in the battle of Carchemish. His troops continued south and west into Syria and Israel (which had been under Assyrian domination) and into Judah in the same year. At that time the Babylonians carried off a group of people as captives including Daniel, Azariah, Mishael and Hananiah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--Daniel 1:1-6, II Chron. 36:6-7).

In **598** B.C. King Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:1) but before he could reach Jerusalem Jehoiakim died and his son, Jehoiachin, became king but his reign lasted only three months and ten days (II Chron. 36:9) before Nebuchadnezzar arrived in 597 B.C. and took him and many others (including Ezekiel) as captives to Babylon. Zedekiah, a brother of Jehoiakim and last remaining son of Josiah was then made king (II Kings 24:17) but he, too, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Chron. 36:11) in **587** B.C. Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem in **586** B.C. and destroyed the city, burning the temple and carrying its treasures, along with thousands of the best of the people as captives to Babylon (II Kings 25:1-21, II Chron. 36:11-21). So, there were three deportations to Babylon in 605, 597 and 586 B.C.

In **538** B.C. Cyrus, king of Persia, captured Babylon and became ruler of the vast Babylonian empire. Cyrus' policy was to allow the people brought to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar and his followers (in order to keep them from rebelling against him in their homeland) to return to their native lands, if they wished to do so. Only a small percentage of the Jews in Babylon chose to return to Judah (about 50,000) because the trip was expensive, long and difficult and most of the Jews had become well-settled in Babylonia.

Just as there were three deportations into the exile during the Babylonian period, so there were three stages in the return and restoration to Palestine in the Persian period. The first group returned in **535** B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel who led the people in the re-building of the temple (Ezra 2:1-2, 3:1-13, see also Haggai and Zechariah 1-7). The second group returned with Ezra in **458** B.C. Ezra stressed the importance of obeying God's Law (Ezra 9 & 10 and Nehemiah 8:1-13). The third group returned with Nehemiah in **445-444** B.C. Nehemiah led the people to re-build the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-6, 12:27-43) and in the restoration of proper temple worship (Neh. 12:44-13:31).

From the 1st deportation to the first return--70 years (605-535 B.C.)

From the 1st deportation to the last return--160 years (605-445 B.C.)

From the 3rd deportation to the first return--51 years (586-535 B.C.)

From the 3rd deportation to the last return--141 years (586-445 B.C.)

E. The Major Prophets (Prophetic literature, mostly poetic) (5)

All of the writing prophets (both major and minor) basically call on God's people to repent

or else face judgment. They also speak of God's judgment on other nations. (The biblical references take one to the parallel passages in the historical books.)

1. **Isaiah** (See II Kings 14-20)
1-39 Warnings of coming judgment because of Israel's disobedience
40-66 Promises of comfort and restoration
2. **Jeremiah** (See II Kings 22-25)
Warnings of coming judgment in the last days of the kingdom
3. **Lamentations** (II Kings 25)
Poems expressing grief over the destruction of Jerusalem
4. **Ezekiel** (II Kings 24-25)
Warnings by means of weird visions and prophetic words and actions about the coming judgment on God's people and their eventual restoration
5. **Daniel** (II Kings 24)
Faithful living during the exile; visions of future kingdoms (Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus - at least 70 years)

F. The Minor Prophets (Prophetic literature, mostly poetic) (12)

1. **Hosea** (II Kings 14-20) (1:1-2:1 see Rom. 9:25-26 and I Peter 2:9-10)
Sharing God's heartache for His spiritually adulterous people
2. **Joel** (II Kings 22 - days of Josiah)
The day of the Lord – God's coming judgment
3. **Amos** (II Kings 14) Demanding social justice
4. **Obadiah** (Unknown) Edom (Petra -- City carved out of stone) will fall!
5. **Jonah** (II Kings 14:25) God loves even Assyrians!
6. **Micah** (II Kings 15:32-20:21) The meaning of true covenant living
7. **Nahum** (II Kings 19) Nineveh, capital of Assyria, will fall under God's judgment.
8. **Habakkuk** (II Kings 24) Questions God's ways in judgment on His people.
9. **Zephaniah** (II Kings 25) God will judge all the earth.
10. **Haggai** (Ezra 5) Messages of encouragement to re-build the temple after the exile
11. **Zechariah** (Ezra 5) Encouragement to rebuild the temple; visions of God's coming kingdom
12. **Malachi** (After Nehemiah) God's concern for the moral conditions of His people and their lack of commitment to Him.