



BIBLE COURSE

“THE OLD TESTAMENT”



14 LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

INDEX

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*“View of today’s
Jerusalem.”*



1 CREATION



READ GENESIS 1 AND GENESIS 2

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED...

The first book of the Bible is Genesis. The word “genesis” means “becoming” or “origin”. Therefore Genesis begins with the Hebrew term bereshit = in the beginning. This book describes the origin of heaven and earth, as well as the origin of the people of Israel. It deals with the origin of sin and all the misery in the world, but it also mentions the origin of God’s promise. God Himself sent the Deliverer to the world. Jesus Christ earned forgiveness for our sins. He made sure that peace and harmony, eternal blissful life with God would again be possible.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

This is a direct and clear answer to the question: where does everything come from?

So God informs us that He is the Creator and that everything stems from Him. Out of nothing God created heaven and earth. On this earth everything was desolate and empty. But then God began to speak. Only by means of speaking, He saw to it that in six days all things came into existence:

- First day: light
- Second day: the firmament (= the atmosphere)
- Third day: the separation between water and land, as well as the creation of vegetation
- Fourth day: light bearing planets: sun, moon and stars
- Fifth day: the birds and the fish
- Sixth day: the land animals and mankind
- The seventh day was established as the day of rest.

GOD CREATED

God created the heavens and the earth: all things came into existence by means of God's speaking. He had no need of raw materials. His omnipotence is hereby revealed. His wish, His will, and His word are at the root of this creation. Therefore we can never say that the earth, with all that lives, is worthless or of no importance. God has made all these things. *And God saw that it was good.*

It is presented as a recurring statement. After the creation of humans we even read: *And God saw all that He had made, and see, it was very good* (Genesis 1:31). It is not God's fault that there is so much in our world which is not good.

DAY OF REST

God implemented a day of rest. God created everything in six days and rested on the seventh day. God's "work week" serves as a model for mankind: six days of work and one day of rest.

CREATED AFTER GOD'S IMAGE

God created all the animals after their kind. From the outset there have been different kinds of animals. There is, therefore, no evolutionary progression from one type to another. In contrast to the animals, man was created *after the image of God* (Genesis 1:26-28). Man does not live on this earth to just serve himself, but in order to display the image of God on earth. God is holy, righteous, full of love and perfectly good; in like manner must man display these perfections. On earth man is God's representative and ambassador. This determines man's attitude towards his Creator, as well as towards his neighbor and towards everything in God's creation. Man is a "steward". This is also apparent in the order which God gives to every man and woman: *to build and protect the earth* (Genesis 2:15). For this purpose, God gave Adam his wife, called Eve or Woman, as a suitable helper for him (Genesis 2:20). Man and woman belong together, each with their own task: to take care of the created world and not to rule over it.



LIFE FROM GOD

... and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7) Man was created with body and soul. So all of life is in the hands of God. This means that man cannot decide for himself concerning life and death. This fact determines our opinion on subjects as abortion, euthanasia and suicide.

CREATION OR EVOLUTION

Yes, but ... what about the evolution theory? It teaches a different story, doesn't it? According to this theory, primitive life would have arisen by itself from the "big bang". From the most primitive life form, the higher forms would have developed themselves out of the lower forms, without any outside interference. Of course, in the academic world this theory is not so simple as appears in many geography or biology textbooks.

But one thing has to be clearly stated: on the basis of God's own Word, we believe that God has created all things. In opposition to this principle of faith, the theory of evolution seems to be a science. But the theory of evolution has never yet been scientifically proven! Certainly not its beginnings. Consequently, "faith" is also necessary to believe this. Additionally, there are so many "missing links".

Evidently, this theory is just as dependent on the "belief" (or rather unbelief) that there can be no divine Creator. One presupposition underlies the entire theory of evolution, which is based on millions of years of development: that there is no God who has played a role in any of this. People who developed this theory with Darwin, have acknowledged this. It was their deliberate purpose to put forward a position contrary to the Biblical faith in God as Creator of heaven and earth. After all, according to their perceptions of reality, you cannot be a scientist if you believe in God's intervention.

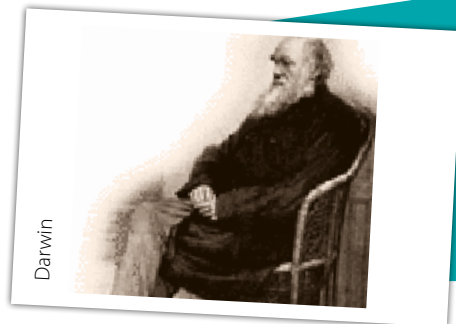
But this is actually a very unscientific position! Because this means that what we cannot comprehend with our minds, must be impossible. Hereby science is stating a position which it cannot defend. In doing so, it is going outside its boundaries. It is exactly this critical point that someone who believes in the Bible cannot agree with. This is very clearly expressed in Hebrews 11:1-3: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (...) Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

It might well be that ultimate purpose for contriving the theory of evolution is that mankind does not want to reckon with a Creator, because they do not want to acknowledge that every person will eventually have to give account to his Creator of everything which they have done. In Acts 17:31 Paul says to the Athenians *that He* (= God)

hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world (= all people who have lived therein) *in righteousness by that Man* (= Jesus Christ, God's Son) *Whom He hath ordained* (= appointed) *thereto*.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the word Genesis mean?
2. The animals were "created according to their nature"; mankind "in the image of God". What is indicated in these expressions?
3. What mandate does God give to mankind regarding His creation? (Genesis 2:15)
4. Why is the theory of evolution to be rejected on Biblical grounds?
5. What is the essential element of the biblical account of creation?
6. God made man to rule over creation. The command was: to till the earth and to preserve it. What can be concluded concerning the performance of this command when we observe: the disappearance of animal and plant species / factory farming / nuclear waste / our treatment of the environment / our relations with our fellowmen?
7. Read John 1:1-5. John begins his gospel by making a remarkable reference to the Word.
 - What is he saying about this Word in these first verses?
 - Who is meant by this?
8. Read Genesis 1:16
 - What is "the greater light to rule the day"?
 - What is "the lesser light to rule the night"?
9. Read Genesis 2:1-3
 - Why do Christians observe the day of rest?
10. Read Genesis 2:18-24
 - What is indicated here about marriage as opposed to its alternatives?



2 OF SIN AND GRACE

READ GENESIS 3

TO MISS THE MARK

In this world and during our lives we encounter many things which are awful and disturbing. The worst of these is death. Do we have an explanation for this? That there is so much misery is not because of God, the Creator, but because of man. (See lesson 1)

The world is no longer the way God has intended it to be. It is as though a breach or ravine runs through everything, namely sin. (See glossary of key words) Sin means missing the true purpose in life. How did this come about? We read that God made an agreement with Adam (and in him were included all his descendants (Genesis 2:16-17)). If, in love, Adam was obedient to his Creator, he would be able to earn everlasting life for himself and for all those who came after him. This obedience was put to the test by the following pact which God made: He was allowed to eat of all trees in paradise, *except from the tree of knowledge of good and evil*. If he violated this command, he would *die the death*. Things went seriously wrong, because the devil (see glossary of key words) came and spoke by means of the serpent.

First he approached Eve and very cunningly asked: *hath God said: you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?* This was the first lie of the devil. Eve replied: "No, it is only forbidden to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden. Because if we eat from that tree, we will die." Then came the second lie: "If you eat of the forbidden fruit, you shall not die, but you shall be as God and be able to determine for yourself what is good or bad!" At this point mankind was a lost cause. Eve ate, then gave of the forbidden fruit to her husband, and in spite of God's prohibition, he also ate of the forbidden fruit (nowhere are we told that this was an apple!). Mankind sinned. He was disobedient to God's command. He missed the goal: to live with Him in love for His honor. He has believed the devil above God. In this way he has *rebelled against God*. He thereby indicated that he wished to determine for

himself what is good or bad. In doing so, he broke the relationship with God. As a result, he lost eternal bliss. Because of this all life on earth is corrupted. All forms of misery such as war, disagreement, sickness, pain, worry, difficulty, sorrow, yes even death have entered the world as a result.

THE PUNISHMENT UPON SIN

The first man, Adam, and his wife, hid themselves from God: they were afraid. But their interpersonal relationship was also disrupted. Man and wife also hid from each other by making aprons for themselves. They no longer dared to be exposed and naked in front of each other. Because the innocent nakedness they had before this sin, which did not arouse any impure thoughts, had been tainted by sin: now it tempts to egoistical sensuality. Many such miserable consequences have introduced themselves into God's creation.

Death, as punishment for sin, has also entered into creation as a consequence. Because God had said: *in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*. Because the holy God could not bear sin and therefore could not tolerate that sinful man should continue to live. By sinning against God man has, willingly and knowingly, brought upon himself the punishment for sin:

- Corporal death (= every person on earth will face death once)
- Spiritual death (= a self-focused life instead of living to the honor of God. Not knowing God and failing to acknowledge Him)
- Eternal death (= once, after this life to be forever separated from God, and to have to bear His wrath against sin. In the Bible this is referred to as hell.)

All this is because mankind did not want to listen to God, did not want to obey Him (was disobedient). Because he wanted to be his own lord and master! In his covenant with God, Adam represented all his descendants. In this way man's life went off course, and he forfeited life in glory with God, his Creator. The curse due to sin now rests upon the life of every person. There is not one person who is still capable of living to God's honor. Self-orientation is now in our genes. Everyone now enters the world with a sinful nature. We inherit this from Adam. From within man there is no way back to God. We can only be rescued by God. We all need regeneration, repentance and faith. Only then can the separation be mended. Fortunately, this is possible, coming from God.

THE MOTHER PROMISE

God provided for a new beginning and launched the battle against the devil. *I will put enmity between thee* (= the serpent = the devil) *and the woman, and between thy seed* (descendants) *and her seed; it shall bruise thy head* (= totally) *and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Genesis 3:15).

What this means? The serpent is once going to be destroyed, the devil will suffer a crushing defeat. That will not occur without difficulty, because the serpent will make man suffer. The arrival and advancement of God's promised rescue will be accompanied with suffering, caused by Satan. But the victory is certain. Someone will come from the seed (descendants) of the woman who will conquer the devil.

We now know that this has indeed occurred: Jesus Christ has taken up the battle.

- With God's promise of the coming of the Deliverer, the devil already received the first blow and had to suffer defeat.
- At Jesus' birth in Bethlehem the devil received the next blow: even though the devil had attempted so many times to make this impossible, Jesus was born, who would be victorious over sin, death, and the devil by His death.
- On Golgotha the devil received the decisive blow: Jesus gave His life as a ransom for the guilt of all true believers. He delivered them out of the clutches of the devil. Only through the sacrifice of Christ there is redemption, making it possible for God and His creature to be reconciled. Only by faith in Him there is again peace with God; everlasting life is again possible.
- And a time will come when the devil will receive his final blow. At present he still stirs up much evil in the world; just think of quarrels, criminality, oppression, wars, etc. Throughout all ages the devil has attempted to hinder man's coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For the believers living with Christ will be accompanied by suffering. Additionally, they are attacked by the devil who tries to rob them of their hope in God. But one day the devil and sin will be definitively defeated: in the heavenly glory they will no longer be able to oppress the believers. Then the devil will be permanently locked up in hell. Then the word of the Lord Jesus will be fulfilled: See, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

That is why Genesis 3:15 is called the mother promise: it is the mother of all promises in which salvation is promised. This promise is the scarlet thread throughout this course about the Old Testament. Immediately after the fall into sin God promised the coming of the Deliverer (Messiah). (See previous paragraph at the mother promise).

Through sin the bond between us and the Lord was broken. God has to punish sin in a just

manner. From himself, man has no way of return. But God Himself provides! He opens and shows the way by which the relationship with Him can be restored again. His own Son will come and bear the punishment for sin as well as perfectly keep the law. The Lord Jesus is the Mediator between God and the sinful, guilty person. John 3:16: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

For every individual it is a matter of personal urgency to receive reconciliation with God. Therefore it is necessary to be born again. God wants to grant this, and uses the preaching of His Word for this purpose. By His Holy Spirit, God works faith in His Word, and repentance in the hearts of people. (See key words in glossary: faith, repentance, heart)

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the word sin?
2. From which tree was man not allowed to eat? (Genesis 2:17)
3. How did mankind come to sin? Read Genesis 3:1-6
4. What is the punishment for sin?
5. What kind of death do we all carry in us?
6. By which death is eternal punishment indicated?
7. Read Genesis 3:15. The seed (= a descendant) of Eve will destroy the head of Satan. Who is meant by this?
8. Genesis 3:15 has been called the mother promise. Why would this be?
9. From where alone can the rescue of mankind come? Read John 3:15 and Romans 3:23-24
10. Read Romans 10:17. How do we attain faith in Jesus Christ?



3 SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

READ GENESIS 4-11

SIN, PUNISHMENT AND RESCUE

In Genesis 4, we discover two lines among the descendants of Adam: the line of Abel and the line of Cain. Two brothers, Cain and Abel, each brought an offering to God. God accepted the offering of Abel, but He showed no delight in the offering of Cain (Genesis 4:1-17). Hebrews 11:4 makes clear to us that this not just the result of God's arbitrary will. The true offering is a matter of faith: then it is done out of love to God. Next we read: *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.* Evidently, Abel offered in and through his faith, but Cain did not. Cain noticed (we do not know how) that God was rejecting his offering. He became very angry, took his brother Abel along into the field and beat him to death. The blood of a man colored the earth red ... And how often has this happened since then?

Lamech's behavior is fully in line with Cain's. With a bellowing voice he screamed to his wives: ... *I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold!* (Gen 4:18-24). Hatred, murder and homicide have entered God's perfect creation like a cancerous growth. The reward of sin is death (Romans 6:23). This sounds as a refrain in Genesis 5: ... *and he died ... and he died ...* However, there is also another line mentioned. That is the line of Abel, Seth and Enoch: *Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD* (Genesis 4:26). Here we read of Enoch and Noah: They walked with God! By grace they lived according to His will.

Both of these lines continue to exist up to the time of the flood (= great deluge). This flood did not arrive without cause. We read this clearly in Genesis 6:5-7. The earth was filled with violence. The rebellion of man against God had become so fierce that – speaking in human terms – He came to regret that He had created man. Only Noah found grace in the sight of the LORD. With his wife and three sons, as well as their wives, they were rescued in the

ark. Every other human who was alive on the earth was met with death. After the flood the LORD, as it were, began anew: the earth will again be made full. By means of a covenant God promised to Noah that He would never again punish by means of a total flood. We refer to this covenant as the Covenant of Nature. As a sign of this covenant God gave the sign of the rainbow:

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. (Gen 8:22)

FROM BABEL TO ABRAHAM

After the flood it became apparent that mankind, from his own nature, is not oriented towards God. Again the pride and self-will of man revealed themselves. The people began to dwell in the fruitful valley which is referred to as Shinar in the Bible (present-day Iraq). Here they discovered that you could make buildings with clay and lime. The people built a city, but also a tower.

The purpose of this tower was: *And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (Gen 11:4)*

God had instructed mankind that they were to spread across the earth in order to cultivate the ground (Genesis 9:1). But the people made their own plans, totally contrary to God's order. That is what mankind is like. Upon this development, God came against man and confused his speech. They could no longer communicate with each other, and as a result the construction of the tower came to a halt: *Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Gen 11:9)*

At the conclusion of this passage we read the lineage from Shem, the son of Noah, up to Abraham, the patriarch of the people of Israel. Through him God will fulfill the promise of the coming Redeemer. In spite of the sinfulness and the unfaithfulness of the people, God sticks to His promises.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Genesis 4. How did sin come to light in the family of Adam and Eve?
2. Read Hebrews 11:4. How did Abel present his offering?
3. Read John 3:16. What does every person need in order to be rescued from destruction?
4. What did God punish by means of the flood?
5. Why was Noah spared in the ark?
6. After the flood God made a new beginning. What symbol reminds us of that even today?
7. What does the tower of Babel reveal about the mindset of the people after the flood?
8. What did the Lord do to halt the building of the tower? Read Genesis 11:9.
9. Read Revelation 17:5. Of what is Babel (or Babylon) still a symbol today?
10. Do we still find the two lines of "the seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent" amongst humanity today? Read Malachi 3:18 and John 1:12.

4 ABRAHAM AND ISAAC



READ GENESIS 12 TO 26

GOD BEGINS ANEW

In a world ruined by sin, God began afresh. From amongst all the people alive on the earth, God selected one man: Abram, or as he is later called, Abraham. He became the forefather of a people with a special purpose: Israel. But with this small beginning God had the entire world in view. God called him and promised that:

- from his descendants the Redeemer would arise
- the land of Canaan would be granted to him and his descendants
- they would become a great people

Abraham heard the voice of God, Who said to him: *Get thee out of thy country ... unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation ... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed* (Gen 12:1-3). Time and again God repeated this promise. It runs like a scarlet thread throughout the entire Old Testament. By means of Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, God accomplished his rescue plan.

Abraham heeded the call of God: he obeyed and he went! In doing so he cut many ties which bound him: family, culture and birthplace. From Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) Abraham traveled to Haran, where he resided for a short while. But then the journey continued, on his way to the land of promise. God would guide him along the way. That trust was sufficient for Abraham. He went in faith (Genesis 12:1-9). Together with his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, and with everything which had become his possessions in Haran, they reached the land of promise. As strangers in a land which was unfamiliar to them. After much nomadic wandering – by way of Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20) – Abraham erected his tents under the oak woods (terebinth = turpentine trees) of Mamre, near Hebron, in the south part of Canaan. At that location Abraham erected an altar for God.

*“ People build a city
but also a tower. ”*



His nephew Lot departed from him and began to dwell in the fertile valley near Sodom (Genesis 13). Later the cities in this valley were struck by God's judgment against the sins which were done in these cities (= sodomy). Lot was rescued. The Dead Sea now occupies this territory.

THE COVENANT

Not having any children proved to be a trial for Abraham: no children, then no heir. Nobody who could take care of him in his old age. Nobody to bear the family name into the future. What was now to become of the promise of God that the land of Canaan would be the possession of Abraham's descendants? And how must the promised Redeemer ever arrive? In order to strengthen Abraham's faith God provided him a sign, saying: *Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, (...) So shall thy seed (descendants) be.* (Gen 15:5)

After this God made a covenant with Abraham. The covenant was one-sided. It was concluded at God's initiative. God has thereby bound himself to Abraham!

Circumcision, as a visible token of the covenant with God, would remind Abraham - and everyone who was connected with him - of God's promise: the Redeemer will arrive and the land of Canaan shall belong to the descendants of Abraham. This promise became reality only after they had lived 400 years as strangers in Egypt. The fulfilment of the promise of a Savior would take many centuries longer yet, but God is faithful.

TRIAL

Repeatedly we discover that Abraham's life was all about the fulfilment of God's promises. Although Abraham presently lived in the land of promise, yet the son of promise - from which an entire race of people would originate - was nowhere in sight. And although God repeatedly renewed this promise, after discussing it with Abraham, his wife Sarah finally decided to take the fulfilment of God's promise into her own hands.

Sarah's strategy - according to Eastern ideas - was well-designed. If her special slave girl Hagar, the Egyptian, bore a child, this boy would be passed off as being the son of Sarah. In this way Ishmael was born, the forefather of the Arabians. But he was not the son whom God had promised (Genesis 16).

That promised son was Isaac. In him the promise of a son was finally fulfilled. It was a wonderful birth. Sarah, who was unable to bear children when she was a young woman and who was now already 90 years old, became a mother after all. By then Abraham was already 100 years old. God had kept His promises!

The name "Abraham" will continue to live through his son. From Isaac, the son of promise, God would cause a people to be born which would be a blessing for people of all nations on earth.

Then we read Genesis 22, one of the most difficult and yet most moving histories in the entire Bible. Abraham received an instruction from God that he was to sacrifice his son on the hills of Moriah. Of all people, the very son who had entered this world after so much hardship!

This was indeed a very difficult trial for Abraham. But, he went...*Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure* (Heb 11:19)

...and tied his son down on the altar on the mount Moriah (according to Chronicles 3:1 the temple was later erected at this site). At the very moment when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, God spoke: *Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest (love) God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.* (Gen 22:11-13) God provided a lamb as a burnt offering to Himself. The faith of Abraham had withstood the trial. Also at this time he trusted in God, even though he could not comprehend it all. Once again, God renewed His promise to bless Abraham and his descendants. In this manner it became evident that Abraham clung to the promise, even when they did not seem to come true. In doing so, Abraham was the father of all believers.

GOD'S PROMISE FULFILLED IN ISAAC

Isaac married Rebekah. They remained childless for twenty years. Here again the LORD tested His own work. We read of Isaac: *And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.* (Gen 25:21)

They received two sons, twins: Esau and Jacob. The name of the latter means: the one who is at the other one's heels. The blessing of God and His promise carried over from father Abraham to his son Isaac. In turn, Isaac may later again pass this blessing on to his son. Not to the oldest, but to the youngest, Jacob.

We read in Genesis 12 how it all began with Abraham. It began with God: Now the Lord had said to Abraham... God did not abandon humanity after the fall into sin. After all that had happened before Noah and after the flood and the erecting of the tower of Babel. In this account about Abraham, the Lord made a new beginning for the third time. He wishes

to gather people to Himself from amongst all the nations, and to restore the relationship broken by sin once again. He wants to deliver from sin and from the evil one by means of a Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. God will send His Son to earth. This Son will give His life as a ransom for the guilt of sin, and by this means again restore peace with God. God wants to provide rescue.

It is still like that. God seeks persons before they seek Him. Did Abraham have faith when God's initial call came to him? No, but that is exactly the mystery of the calling God. Through grace God also grants faith and obedience. God grants this through His Holy Spirit, in order that the relationship with God is again restored. He enters our innermost being, our human heart, and turns everything upside down. Conversion occurs! A life directed at God, instead of "I" being the center of my world. God also wants to provide this presently. He also calls you. In the Bible He states: *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else* (Isa 45:22).

"Terebinths."



QUESTIONS

1. What task and what promise did Abraham receive from God?
2. What does Abraham's obedience demonstrate? Read also Hebrews 11:8.
3. What was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham?
4. Read Genesis 11, 12 and 13. Here Abram's journey to the Promised Land is described. What were his experiences? Read Genesis 11:31-32, 12:4-6, 12:8-10, 13:1, 13:12, 13:18.
5. Where in Canaan did Abraham erect his tents?
6. In later years Abraham occupied only a small part of the Canaanite country. Which part? Read Genesis 23. This is near Hebron. Why is this city still of great interest for both the Israelis as well as the Palestinians?
7. What is the recurring theme in Abraham's life?
8. Was Ishmael the promised son? Of what people is he the ancestor?
9. Who was the promised son? What does his name mean?
10. Read Genesis 22. What instruction did Abraham receive? How did this turn out?

5 JACOB AND JOSEPH



READ GENESIS 26-50

JACOB

Once again in the history of Jacob, the theme is the promise of God and the blessing which is attached to this. God had informed Rebekah that Jacob would be granted the greatest of blessings: the birthright. This included:

- succeeding his father as head of the family
- a double portion of the inheritance
- the birth of the Messiah from his descendants

Jacob had already cheated his older brother Esau out of the birthright promises for a bowl of red pottage. (Genesis 25)

One day it appeared that Esau would get the birthright after all. At this point mother Rebekah developed a sly strategy with Jacob. She was determined that Jacob must receive this blessing at all costs. Father Isaac was blind. With a deceitful exchange of clothing, by which he came across as being Esau, Jacob managed to obtain the blessing from his father. Jacob received the birthright and the traditional promise was passed on to the descendants of Jacob. Yet it becomes clear that however crooked Jacob's dealings were, for him the possession of the promise, the blessing, was worth more than any other possessions in the here and now. For Esau this was different: he chose for a bowl of food. For a petty temporal delight, he surrendered the divine blessing.

For the time being the blessing provided Jacob very little delight: he had to flee. At Bethel Jacob saw heaven opened in a dream, and angels ascending and descending a ladder. Here God renewed His promise: *...the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; (...) And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land* (Gen 28:13-15).

“God has committed Himself to Abraham.”



Jacob escaped to his uncle Laban, where he married his daughters (Jacob's cousins) Leah and Rachel. To them twelve sons and a daughter were born. After a good twenty years he departed from Laban as a richly blessed shepherd king, heading back to Canaan, upon the command of God.

At Peniel, shortly before his arrival from Canaan, Jacob wrestled to obtain the blessing of God. He was able to prevail: *Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed* (Gen 32:28). Here we read about the origin of the name Israel. Later this name would be used for all his descendants as the name of a nation. Jacob's twelve sons would later link their names with the twelve tribes of the nation which God had promised. As the nation of Israel, they would dwell in the land of God's promise, Canaan, and cultivate the ground.

After Peniel Jacob met his brother Esau. They patched up their relationship, after which each of them pursued his different way again. From now on Esau would dwell in the land of Seir, in the southeast of Canaan. We encounter his descendants in the Old Testament as the Edomites. When Jacob was on his way toward his father in Canaan, Rachel died near Bethlehem. Shortly after he arrived, his father Isaac also died.

JOSEPH

The story of Jacob's further life was determined by events surrounding his son Joseph. Joseph was the son of Rachel, of whom Jacob was most fond and whom he lost first. Because he favored Joseph, the other sons detested him. Moreover, Joseph related his dreams to them. In these dreams his father, mother and brothers all bowed before him. This increased their anger. When one day Joseph went at his father's command to find his brothers, who were far away from home with their flocks, they took their chance. They seized Joseph, threw him into a dry well, and then sold him to some Midianite traveling merchants.

“At Bethel Jacob sees heaven opened in a dream.”



These men sold him at the slave market in Egypt. The brothers sent a message to their father that Joseph was probably destroyed by a wild animal. As evidence they sent along his colorful cloak, which they had dipped in the blood of a lamb. Subsequently, Jacob spent many years grieving inconsolably over Joseph.

EGYPT

Once in Egypt, Joseph arrived as a slave into the household of Potiphar, the master of the bodyguards of pharaoh (= Egyptian title for king). He earned the trust of his lord and became head of the court. The wife of Potiphar repeatedly begged him to commit adultery with her. Joseph refused and stated: *how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?* (Genesis 39:9). Then this woman reversed the rolls and accused Joseph of the evil to which she had been trying to entice him. Totally innocent, he landed in prison. Here the LORD was also with him. He became the right arm of the prison warden.

In prison Joseph came in contact with two prominent servants of pharaoh, the cupbearer and the baker. Both had a dream. Joseph told them the meanings. The cupbearer was then restored to his previous job, but the baker met his death. Joseph implored the cupbearer to put in a good word for him. But this man forgot him for a long time, until the pharaoh also dreamt two dreams. Joseph was called and explained the pharaoh's dreams. There would be seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of drought and subsequent hunger.

Joseph was appointed to carry out a plan to survive the approaching years of famine; he became vice-regent and carried the most authority of anyone except the pharaoh. During the seven years of plenty Joseph purchased all the supplies of grain and stockpiled these. When the seven years of hunger arrived, not only the Egyptians came to Joseph for bread, but also the people from surrounding countries, such as Canaan.

In this way God directs the life of man. He brought the brothers - who came to buy grain in Egypt - in renewed contact with Joseph. At first they did not recognize him. After he had put them through several trials, he made his identity known to them. Eventually father Jacob and all his descendants were permitted to settle in Egypt, in the countryside of Goshen. There Joseph provided for them.

Father Jacob died in Egypt, but was buried in the family grave, the cave of Machpelah, near Hebron in Canaan. Joseph died when he was 110 years old.

In Egypt the descendants of Jacob increased to a countless nation. Before God delivered them from Egypt and returned them to Canaan, they first had to endure many years of oppression. They became slaves to a pharaoh who had not known Joseph.

But God kept His word. He had promised them Canaan. That is where the people would dwell, and that is where the Redeemer would be born. Joseph was a type, an example,

of the coming Messiah. His life was a life of suffering towards glory. In this way Jesus would one day come in order to suffer and to die. After this He would arise from the dead and enter into His glory. In this way He will also deliver all those who believe in Him from their sins and death, and one day bring them into His glory.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Genesis 25. What did Esau sell to Jacob?
2. Read Genesis 28. What did Jacob see while escaping to Bethel, and what did the LORD promise?
3. What happened at Peniel? What was Jacob's name after this?
4. List the 12 sons of Jacob. Read Genesis 49. These are the later twelve tribes of the nation which God had promised. Read Deuteronomy 33.
5. What caused the bad feelings amongst Joseph's brothers, and what did they do? Read Genesis 37:1-11.
6. In what country did Joseph arrive, and by whom was he employed?
7. What did Joseph say when he was being tempted? Genesis 39:9b.
8. What did Pharaoh's dream mean? Read Genesis 41:29-31.
9. Read Genesis 50:20. At the end of his life, how did Joseph reflect upon the evil which his brothers had done towards him?
10. How is Joseph a type (= prefigure) of the coming Messiah?

"In Egypt Joseph enters Potiphar's house as slave."



6 OUT OF EGYPT



READ EXODUS 1 – 13

MOSES

Moses' life consisted of three periods of 40 years each:

1. At the Egyptian court. During the first 40 years he was nurtured and educated in the wisdom of Egypt.
2. Shepherd in the Negev desert. There he married Zipporah, the daughter of the shepherd king Jethro.
3. Leader of the people through the desert to the promised land.

Jacob's family had settled in the land of Goshen with 70 persons. Granted, that is not a large number, but the descendants increased in number dramatically.

The book of Exodus (= departure) in the Bible informs us that the Israelites became so numerous that the Egyptians began to view them as a developing threat: the "foreigners" could one day attempt to usurp power.

And so it happened after years that a pharaoh came to power who imposed forced labor upon the Israelites: they had to build the fortified cities of Pithom and Ramses. The Israelites sighed under the strenuous slave work and the mistreatment to which they were exposed (Exodus 1:1-14). When it became evident that the Israeli population continued to expand, the midwives were ordered to kill all male babies upon birth. When this measure did not have the desired result, the pharaoh decided that all newborn boys were to be drowned in the Nile River. For the people of God's promise – far from the Promised Land – it became an unbearable situation. Then a son was born in the household of Amram and Jochebed. He was put in a small basket which was sealed with pitch – a mini coffin – and put in the Nile (see Hebrews 11:23). That is where the Egyptian princess found him. And that is how a Jewish boy arrived at the palace of the pharaoh of Egypt. He was given a name: Moses, a name which, according to the princess, meant: I have retrieved him from

the water. He was raised at the Egyptian court. But in spite of his Egyptian upbringing, Moses continued to feel a bond with his people. The oppression of his people touched his heart. One day he slew an Egyptian who was torturing an Israelite. This became known and Moses fled to the desert of Sinai. Here he became a servant to Jethro, a shepherd king.

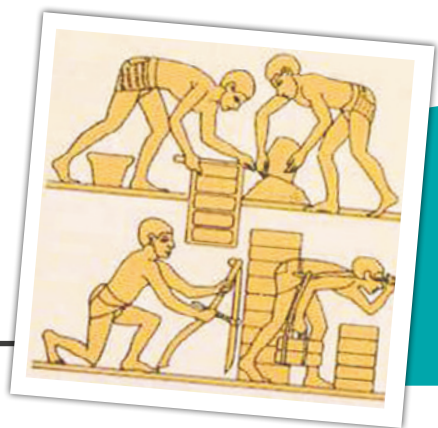
GOD CALLED

Once, while Moses was traveling through the Sinai desert as a shepherd, he was called by God to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt. At that occasion God revealed His Name (Exodus 3:1-15). To us a name is only a means of indicating a person. That is different in the Bible. There a person's name expresses the nature of the person: a person's name is his being. So it is also with the Name of God. That Name, fully expressed, states: I am that I am! It means: I have always been and I shall always continue to be. I am also always the same: what I promise, I also do. The name of God: JHWH – Jahweh or Jehovah – is always written with the capital letters LORD in the Old Testament in our translation of the Bible.

In this manner God revealed to Moses and to His people Who He is and what His nature is: He is the Eternal one. He stands by His word and keeps His promises ... towards all those whom He calls and whom He teaches to hope in Him and to expect all their help from Him! You may therefore expect this from God, because of His Name: He is always the same and does as He has promised. That is His covenant faithfulness.

When Moses returned to his people, he was allowed to remind them of the promises of the covenant, of the God of the covenant: *And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.* (Ex 3:15)

**“The Israelites
conduct slave labor
for the Egyptians.”**



FROM THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE

Upon God's command, Moses and his brother Aaron went to the pharaoh to speak on God's behalf: Let my people go ... (Exodus 5:1). But the Pharaoh refused to let the people go. When the working conditions became increasingly intolerable, the people of Israel did not want anything more to do with Moses: ultimately he was given the blame for the increased servitude.

Then the Lord demonstrated Who He is for His people: ten plagues of death and destruction came over Egypt (Exodus 7:12).

After the tenth plague, the death of all the firstborn in Egypt, the pharaoh finally let the people go. The Israelites had by now lived in Egypt for a period of 430 years (Exodus 12:40). And the people of God's covenant departed rapidly, back to the promised land of Canaan. The LORD Himself went before them. During the day they saw a pillar of cloud (which protected them from the heat of the day) and at nights the pillar of fire guided the way. When they came near to the Red Sea (Reed Sea), the Egyptian armies were unexpectedly right behind them. However, God Himself cleared a path through the water, so that the people of Israel could pass through with dry feet. When the Egyptians also attempted to use this path (in order to again make themselves masters over these people), the sea closed and the entire army of the Egyptians perished in the waves (Exodus 14).

At the opposite side of the Red Sea a song of departure was now heard: the Song of Moses (Exodus 15). A song of praise to the God of Israel, the LORD, the God of the covenant, who had proven that His name is true: He keeps His word.

The God of the covenant, who delivered His people directly through the waters and led them out of the house of bondage.

PESACH

Israel still has a feast day which dates back to the departure from Egypt: the Pesach feast or Passover (Exodus 12). Pesach means "to pass by". With this feast the people commemorate how, during the night of departure, when all the firstborn in Egypt died, the firstborn of Israel were spared. The angel of destruction passed by the doorposts of the Israelites if there was blood smeared on them. The blood of a lamb, which had given its life in order to rescue people from death. An example of the great sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ. To this day the Jews still celebrate Pesach with unleavened cakes (as image of the haste with which they departed from Egypt), bitter herbs (as image of the forced labor) and wine (as image of joy).

QUESTIONS

1. What was the direct cause for the Israelites to go to Egypt? Where in Egypt did they dwell? Read Genesis 47:1.
2. What does the name Moses mean? Read Exodus 2:10.
3. What were the three periods of Moses' life?
4. How did God reveal Himself to Moses, and what does His name mean? Read Exodus 3:14.
5. When did the pharaoh allow the people to leave? How long had the Israelites then dwelt in Egypt?
6. Which Jewish feast reminds of the departure from Egypt? Read Exodus 12:11, 21, and 48.
7. What do the Israelites commemorate on their Pesach feast?
8. What does the Christian church commemorate on the Passover feast? Read Matthew 28.
9. Read Exodus 12:1-28. Write down a number of similarities between the Jewish Pesach feast and the Christian Passover or Easter. (Think of: "the passing by", the firstborn son, the blood and the lamb)
10. It is sometimes stated of Moses that he is a type (= foreshadowing) of Jesus. Can you think of a reason for this?

"However, God Himself opens a way through the water."



7 IN THE WILDERNESS, I



READ EXODUS

LIBERATED

The people of Israel were so delighted when God's power appeared during the escape from Egypt. God had delivered: they were free. Free to be the people of God. Free to depart to the Promised Land. But once they were in the desert it became apparent that the way to the Promised Land was not a direct route. First they encountered lack of water, but the water at the spring of Marah proved to be undrinkable. After this their stomachs began to rattle from hunger. "Would to God we had stayed in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; do we have to die from hunger in the wilderness?" No one remembered the horrible misery of the Egyptian slavery. Every person only saw the present need. But God provided for His people along the way. Also for food and drink. He provided:

- Elim, an oasis with twelve (!) fountains and seventy palm trees (Exodus 15:22-27)
- manna, bread for along the way (Exodus 16)
- quails, meat from birds (Exodus 16)

God provided for His people as they journeyed.

Also when the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16).

CONCLUDING A COVENANT

The people continued their journey through the desert and arrived in the vicinity of the mount Horeb. God had already said to Moses when He announced Israel's liberation: *When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain* (Ex 3:12). That is the mountain where God had revealed himself to Moses.

They had been delivered from Egypt. The LORD provided for them as an eagle cares for its young. Now they must also begin to live as the people of God. Therefore God made a

covenant with this elect people on the mount Horeb.

It was a renewal of the covenant with Abraham. The token of the covenant with Abraham, circumcision, was maintained. There was something new introduced, however: a Law written by God's own hand, the Ten Commandments.

A covenant is actually a type of agreement.

In the Eastern world the making of covenants occurred more frequently. For example, between two cities or between a king and his subjects. Usually the conclusion of a covenant was a very elaborate ceremony, attended with sacrificial meals to emphasize the solemnity of the agreement (see Exodus 24:11).

A covenant also included regulatory provisions and agreements to be observed by the parties. These conditions were established in written form.

We encounter some of these elements in the covenant which God made with Israel. Read Exodus 24:1-11. Making a covenant in itself was not unusual; what made this different was that God made a covenant with the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: Ex 3:15, 16 *nd I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people* (Lev 26:12). Even though this people is no better than any other society.

COVENANT RULES

Within the framework of the covenant the LORD now also provided the rules of this covenant.

A : Ten commandments:

The Ten Commandments or ten words of the covenant form the heart of all requirements which God gave to Israel (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Significantly, they begin with the words: *And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage* (Ex 20:1-2).

Israel had been delivered out of Egypt by the LORD. Now Israel also had to live as God's people.

B : Requirements concerning worship:

Especially the books of Exodus and Leviticus are full of stipulations concerning worship such as: about the holy place or sanctuary (the tabernacle), about the way the worship and the sacrifices were to be conducted (the liturgy), about those who do the service (the high priest, the priests, and the Levites, helpers of the priests).

C : Regulations for daily life:

In the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy multiple concrete commands for daily life are found, such as: instructions toward holiness, which also have the character of what

we would refer to as hygiene; as well as commands regarding the possessions of our fellowman, judicial decisions, war, marriage, etc.

All these regulations demonstrate how important a healthy society is to God. The most common things of life are also included in this. For what reason does the LORD give all these regulations and commands? This is the covenant of God! Israel must learn to live as the people of God. By holding themselves to the rules of the covenant they were to demonstrate thankfulness to the LORD for the deliverance which was granted them. God had, after all, freed Israel from Egypt in order for them to live for Him, to serve Him!

THE GOLDEN CALF

How essential God's commands were for Israel, is illustrated by the episode of the golden calf. Since Moses stayed away rather long to speak with God on the mount, the people became insecure. They wanted a concrete god, visible and tangible, such as other societies also had at that time. A god for whom you do not have to wait, but which you can carry in front of you, because you have him in your (!) hand (Exodus 32:1).

In the eyes of God and for Moses this was the most horrendous offense to the honor of Israel's God. The God of heaven and earth cannot be manipulated or cast into an image. God's anger was great. He spoke of exterminating the people so that he could then grow a new people beginning with Moses.

But then Moses stepped in as intercessor and prayed for the preservation of the people. The LORD heard this prayer. Thanks to the grace of God, the covenant yet stands. Here Moses was a type, an example, of the great Intercessor, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for the salvation of a sinful people.

QUESTIONS

1. How did God's care for His people become evident during the journey? Read Exodus 15:22-27 and Exodus 16 and 17.
2. Name three types of regulations which belong to God's covenant.
3. How do the Ten Commandments commence? Read Exodus 20:1 and 2
4. Where do we read about the commands for daily life? Name a few. Do these still have meaning today?

5. Why did the LORD prescribe all these rules and commandments?
6. Read Exodus 25:8. What was to be made?
What is it called? Read Exodus 26:6 / 26:30 / 40:34
7. Read Hebrews 9:4. What was stored inside the Ark of the Covenant (three things)?
To what did these things bear silent witness?
8. Read Leviticus 16. On top of the ark lies the mercy seat. Read Leviticus 16:14-16.
What connection did this have to Jesus' death on the cross? Read also 1 John 4:10.
9. Why did the Israelites defile themselves with the golden calf?
Does it still happen today that people make their own god?
10. Read Exodus 32:30. What did Moses tell the people? How did this end?

"The golden calf."



8 IN THE WILDERNESS, II



READ LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

The continuation of the journey through the wilderness is described in the Bible books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The name Leviticus refers to the regulations for the worship which were to be observed by the Levites (men belonging to the tribe of Levi, helpers of the priests). Numbers means amounts. This book is given this title because it contains various head counts of the people. Deuteronomy means second or repeated law, because in this book Moses repeats the most essential laws. In addition to these subjects, these three books also describe the various events which occurred during the wilderness journey.

At a certain moment the people approached the border of the Promised Land. The wilderness journey appeared to be near its end. Twelve spies were sent out to explore the Promised Land (Numbers 13 and 14). They came back with favorable reports. The land is a good land, overflowing with milk and honey. As proof thereof they brought along an enormous cluster of grapes.

But ...amongst its inhabitants were huge and strong men, giants, who were invincible. Two of the twelve spies, Joshua and Caleb, pointed out that God had promised to give the people of Israel this land. Therefore, they were going to be victorious. But ten of the twelve did not believe in the fulfilment of God's promise. Their advice was that it would be best to simply return to Egypt.

The majority of the people sided with the ten: a clear proof of distrust of God's promises. Once again, the LORD did want to destroy them. And again Moses came forward as intercessor. Again God heard Moses' prayer. The people would not be annihilated. They did, however, have to spend 40 long years roaming through the wilderness. Of the generation which had been delivered out of Egypt, the adults (over the age of 20 years) would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. They were to die in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

A ROAMING EXISTENCE

Then followed forty difficult and sorrowful years. Moses composed a psalm describing this period: Psalm 90.

On one occasion there was rebellion against the authority of Moses. Korah, Dathan and Abiram were the leaders of this rebellion (Numbers 16). God opened the earth and the rebels descended to hell alive. Only the children of Korah (who had distanced themselves from the behavior of their father) were spared (later their descendants belonged to the musicians in the temple!). At another time the people grumbled because they loathed the manna which they received every day from the LORD. As punishment, fiery serpents arrived. Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass and erect it on a tall pole. Everyone who had been bitten and looked to this brass serpent, would remain alive (Numbers 21). In such ways the distrust of God's promises made itself apparent. But equally, the faithfulness of God came to light. Because of His covenant, He continued to help His people, although He did punish them because of their sin. He is, after all, YAHWEH! After 40 years their stay in the wilderness came to an end. Today the Jews still commemorate the protection of God during the wanderings in the desert at their Succoth (Feast of Tabernacles). The booths (tents of foliage and branches) are a reminder of the tents in which Israel dwelt during the wilderness journey. It reinforces that they are never to forget: Israel is and remains the people of God, of JAHWEH!

MOSES DIED

After Moses, upon God's command, had appointed Joshua as his successor, he climbed the mount Nebo. From this ascent he was able to look over the Promised Land. He himself was also not allowed to enter that land, because he once slighted God's honor by acting contrary to God's instructions. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died (Deuteronomy 34). The Lord Himself buried Moses in the land of Moab and no one has ever known where his grave was. Finally the chosen people had arrived at the Promised Land. An end had come to the arduous journey through the desert.

"The Sinai Desert."



PSALM 90

A PRAYER OF MOSES THE MAN OF GOD.

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst
formed the earth and the world,
even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest,
Return, ye children of men.

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is
past, and as a watch in the night.

DEEPER MEANING

There are deeper meanings to be found in this history as well. Foremost amongst these, we should notice the comparison to the life of every Christian. The people of God are always on their way to the Promised Land. And, indeed, this is a journey which runs directly through the wilderness of daily life. The dangers – from within and from without – are gigantic. But God provides during the journey. He shall one day bring His people into the Promised Land: the kingdom of God, the new Paradise. By means of his intercession and mediation Moses is a type, a prefiguring, of the great Mediator, Jesus Christ.

The sign of the raised serpent in the desert was used again by the Lord Jesus (in the New Testament): *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man (= the Lord Jesus) be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:14-15).

With this imagery He points us to His sacrifice on the cross. Just as in the wilderness the people who were bitten so fatally by the serpents, were privileged to look upward to the brass serpent in order to be healed, so everyone who realizes that he or she must succumb to the deadly poison of sin, is called upon to raise their eyes to Jesus, Who gave His life on the cross. To learn by the Holy Spirit: *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed* (Isa 53:5).

QUESTIONS

1. A. Read Numbers 13 and 14. Ten spies brought a negative opinion concerning Canaan and two brought a positive opinion. Which two spies brought a good report?
B. The majority of the people believed the ten spies. What does that indicate?
C. Read Hebrews 3:19. What punishment were the people subjected to?
2. A. Read Psalm 90. Who wrote this Psalm?
B. To what does he compare the life of man?
C. How does God view evil?
D. Read Psalm 90:7, 8 and 12. What is he asking of God?
3. Read Numbers 21:1-9. Compare this to John 3:14 and John 19:17, 18 in the New Testament. What does Jesus mean with the words in John 3:14?
4. A. Why did Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebel? Numbers 16:1-3, 8-22.
B. How did God punish them? Numbers 16:28-33
5. In Deuteronomy 20:1-20 God outlines the rules for warfare. Wars are conducted according to rules. It becomes apparent that Israel's wars are not allowed to be totally destructive. Give at least three evidences of this. What implications does this have for modern warfare?
6. A. Which Jewish feast is a reminder of the wanderings in the wilderness?
B. Read Deuteronomy 16:13-15. How long does this feast last?
7. A. Read Deuteronomy 30:16-20. What promise exists for those who obey God's law and what punishment is there for those who do not?
B. What summary of the law does the Lord Jesus provide in Matthew 22:37-40?
8. A. Read Romans 3:19, 20. Can we make it right with God by strictly keeping His law?
B. How then must we be made right with God? Romans 3:21-24.
9. A. Read Deuteronomy 32:4-6. What great contrast do we read of here?
B. Yet there is still an expectation for the people. How? Read Deuteronomy 32:34.
10. A. From which mount did Moses view the Promised Land?
B. At what age did Moses die?
C. Where is Moses' grave? (Deuteronomy 34)



“As evidence of this they bring along an enormous cluster of grapes.”



9 THE ENTRY INTO CANAAN



READ JOSHUA

JOSHUA: A PROPHETICAL BOOK

This lesson covers the entry of the people of Israel into the Promised Land, and the early period of Israel's inhabiting Canaan. We find this period of history described in the book of Joshua.

This book is named after the primary character, Joshua, the successor to Moses. The book of Joshua follows after the book of Deuteronomy.

Chapters 1 to 12 describe the conquest of Canaan. Chapters 13 to 19 describe the division of the land. Chapters 20 and 21 list the cities of refuge (cities to which people could flee if they had killed someone without intending to, in order to evade the avenger of blood) as well as the cities granted to the Levites. Chapters 22 to 24 mention the return of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to their Transjordan lands, as well as Joshua's last speech and his death.

The book demonstrates that God, the God of the covenant, is faithful in fulfilling His promises.

Joshua brought the people of Israel into Canaan. By doing this he was a type of Christ, who brings His people into eternal, heavenly rest. This book records the historical facts concerning a period of about seventeen years from 1407 to 1390 before Christ.

JOSHUA. THE LORD IS SALVATION

In Joshua 1 we read that Joshua was appointed as successor to Moses. His name represents a policy statement: the LORD is salvation. (His name is the first name into which God's covenant name is incorporated, Numbers 13:16). At Joshua's appointment a promise as well as an assignment were given.

The promise (fulfilment of the promise to Abraham) was: *Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.* (Joshua 1:3), a potent promise, as if it were a

notarized legal document.

The assignment was remarkable: *Only, be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law* (Josh 1:7).

That is the strategy which Moses passed on and to which Joshua and the people were to hold themselves when engaging in the remarkable wars to conquer the land of Canaan.

This assignment later became the guideline for their entire life in the Promised Land (Joshua 23:6): to live according to God's law.

In chapter 2 we are informed about two spies who – from a military viewpoint – completely failed: they were discovered. But the LORD was already ahead of the spies in Jericho. Why?

The LORD intended that one specific inhabitant of Jericho would be spared. One person who believed in Him. This person was a prostitute (!) who lived on the wall of Jericho. Her name is Rahab (Joshua 2).

She hid the spies and helped them to escape from the city. When, later, the entire city of Jericho was destroyed by a miracle, she was spared along with her parents and brothers. She later even received a place in the recorded lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) (see also Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25).

ENTRANCE

The Jordan River forms the eastern border of Canaan. While crossing Jordan, the attention was focused on the ark. The Ark of the Covenant traveled at the head of the people: the God of the covenant went before them! And Israel must never forget that. Twelve stones were placed as memorial. These were erected as a monument in Gilgal, one stone for each tribe. At the strategic moment after completing the crossing, Israel did not immediately begin to war against the inhabitants of the land. First, at God's command, all the Jewish boys and men were circumcised. Now they all carried the sign of the covenant of God. Then the people celebrated the Passover, the feast commemorating that the angel of destruction had passed over them as they were about to depart from Egypt.

The conquest of Jericho was an example of the conquest of all of Canaan. God waged war for His people. Every day they made one journey around the city. The priests blew the shofar – the ram's horn – as symbol of prayer. On the seventh day, the LORD granted the victory by letting the walls collapse. It was His war, after all!

This also explains God's anger when Achan, known as the thief of Jericho, took a portion of the plunder for himself, instead of obeying God's command to give all the treasure to the

LORD. Achan chose wrongly when he was faced with the choice between serving God (obeying His commands) or serving the world (sinfully enjoying what the world offers). In the battles which followed, God gave to each tribe its portion of the Promised Land as their heritage: two and a half tribes in Transjordan (the territory across Jordan), all the others in the land of Canaan (between Jordan and the Mediterranean coast). Only the Levites did not receive their own territory as a tribe: they were in God's service and were entitled to live off this service. They received places to dwell scattered throughout all tribal territories (48 cities in total).

At the end of his life Joshua could truthfully say to the people: Everything is for you! But he also warned Israel that the remnant of Canaan's inhabitants would become a snare to them if Israel did not eradicate them entirely, but got mixed up with them.

THE MEANING OF JOSHUA

The name Jesus is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. In Nehemiah we read already about *Jeshua*. Joshua means: the LORD rescues. Jesus means Savior. He rescues a sinner from misery and brings him into the greatest glory. Joshua is the leader who brought the people into the repose of the Promised Land. Jesus is the ultimate Guide of salvation. It is remarkable that the historical accounts given in this book differ from the descriptions that would be provided in an ordinary history book. The emphasis is placed on God's hand in everything, both in judgment over and punishment for sin as well as in grace and forgiveness upon repentance. The central question is not: What exactly happened? Instead, it is: Why did it happen the way it did? The people have to learn a lesson from this description: how they are to live with God in the future, trusting Him. That is why in the Hebrew Bible the book of Joshua is counted among the prophetic books: it brings a message to us from God, in the way the prophets were also messengers of God. That explains why it is not the heroic deeds of Israel which get most attention. What is most important is, that Israel received the land as a gift from the LORD, even in spite of their sinfulness. The Lord perseveres with His people, because they are His covenant people. The book of Joshua opens our eyes for God's dealings in history. After all, Joshua means: the LORD is salvation.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the book of Joshua emphasize?
2. What does it mean that the book of Joshua is prophetic?

3. To whom was Joshua the successor?
4. A. Read Joshua 1:1-9. What did the LORD promise to Joshua and the people?
B. What assignment was given to Joshua?
5. Read Joshua 23:1-6. To whom did Joshua give the same command at this place?
6. A. Who in Jericho believed in the LORD and was spared? (Joshua 6:22, 23)
B. What do we read about her in Hebrews 11:31?
7. A. How many stones served as memorial in Jordan?
B. Why do you think this number was important? (Joshua 4)
8. A. How was Jericho conquered? (Joshua 6:1-20)
B. Read Hebrews 11:30. How was the city taken?
9. A. Why did the people suffer a defeat at Ai? (Joshua 7:20)
B. How was the thief punished? (Joshua 7:25)
10. A. What does the name Joshua mean?
B. Whose name means Savior?
C. Read Matthew 1:21. What is the work of the Lord Jesus?

“Remains of the walls of ancient Jericho.”



10 IN THE PROMISED LAND



READ JUDGES

JUDGES: SIN AND GRACE

The land belongs to God and the people belong to God. But what then does Israel do with the land, and what do they do with the LORD? The book of Judges is also a prophetic book. It evaluates the historical events in light of God's holy law. It reveals what happens when we depart from God's law and go our own ways. The people of Israel made themselves despicable in the sight of God. The Israelites did not abide by God's command to eradicate all the nations of Canaan! We could ask ourselves: But why was that so necessary? These nations posed a serious moral threat for Israel through their idol worship and their abominable deeds. That is why God wanted them to be removed: so that their sins would not become a temptation for His people.

However, Israel did not eradicate these peoples. So they brought upon themselves the punishment for this sin: these nations posed a permanent existential military and moral threat. Because the gods of these nations also had their power to attract, Israel abandoned the LORD. Consequently, the Israelites ended up dwelling so centrally amongst the heathen peoples that they began to form families with them in mixed marriages. For these nations, nature was animated with divine powers. Powers with which one must attempt to remain on good terms. Their nature worship proved to have an irresistible attraction. These nations worshipped the Baals. In many cases each city or district had its own Baal (= lord). There were also Baals for specific aspects of nature: a Baal of the weather, of the rain, etc. The feminine counterpart to Baal was the goddess Astarte or Asherah. She was the personification of fertility. Involvement in these nature religions was combined with loose and immoral practices. In order to promote fertility for themselves or for agricultural growth, the women gave their bodies to the priests in the temple. Homosexuality also had a place in the religious ceremonies.

And the people of Israel began – in spite of God’s warnings – to participate in this with zeal. The introduction to the book of Judges records the often recurring refrain regarding this period of Israel’s history: *apostasy – punishment – repentance – rescue by means of a judge – rest – apostasy – punishment – etc.*

This refrain is the underlying theme of every historical event in the book of Judges. It is, therefore, not primarily an exciting account of heroes, but it focuses – prophetically – on the sins of the people of God’s covenant and the grace of the God of the covenant!

UNFAITHFULNESS AND FAITHFULNESS

The judges were men, as well as one woman, who were used of God to rescue the Israelites from the oppressors. Their initial task was to relieve the people from their oppression. Once they had taken up their office, they also passed sentence and they ruled over the people of God.

Yet the book of Judges ends with the words: In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Evidently the people of Israel had learned very little. The ending chapters of Judges make this terrifyingly clear. Although the LORD had provided Israel a place to settle down, the manner in which they treated God’s gift demonstrates how ungrateful mankind is. It is a marvel that God still carries on with us. He keeps His covenant and fulfils His plan.

Because of the situation at the time of the Judges, the people asked for a king. (We read this in the first book of Samuel). A king, just like the people surrounding the elect people of God had. In this request, expressed in these words (... to judge us like all the nations ...), they denied the leadership of God over His people.

“Deborah.”



READ RUTH

THE BOOK OF RUTH

God is faithful, also when the people prove to be unfaithful.

The history described in the book of Ruth also took place during the period of the Judges. This book of the Bible proves that God builds during a time of human decay and sins. Because of draught and threatening famine, a man named Elimelech moved from the Promised Land (!) to the heathen country of Moab. His two sons married Moabite girls. Elimelech and both of his sons died in Moab. When the widow Naomi returned to Israel, one of the daughters in law – Ruth – departed with her. Once in Israel, she eventually married Boaz, a rich farmer from the tribe of Judah. This tribe still bore the Divine promise of the coming Messiah. In this manner, Ruth became one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus.

The deeper meaning of this book is as follows:

While Israel was experiencing a period of decline, Ruth was added to the nation of promise. From amongst one of the most pagan nations: Moab. While the entire nation of Israel was negating God’s laws, blessings still proved to be possible. Boaz, who became Ruth’s husband, lived according to God’s law and had a heart for his neighbor in need. The deeper, spiritual, background to this book is that Boaz was a type (a prefiguring) of the Lord Jesus. As Boaz acquired his bride, so Christ deals with all those who receive faith in Him. He is the Bridegroom, the true believers are the bride. This chapter also demonstrates that God’s promises are always fulfilled. While there was “no king in Israel”, God secretly prepared for the birth of David, the king. Ruth was David’s great grandmother and is therefore recorded in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

QUESTIONS

1. A. Which commandment of God did the people not obey?
B. Why did God give this command?
2. What is the ever recurring refrain (the central theme) during this period of Israel’s history?
3. The book of Judges is not about exciting tales of heroes. What is it about then?
4. What was the task of a judge?

5. Match the names of the Judges to their specific roles. Read Judges 3 to 16.
Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Thola, Jair, Jephtha, Ebzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson
 - a. He was very strong and fought against the Philistines
 - b. He was left-handed and killed Eglon, the king of the Moabites
 - c. He came from Gilead and judged for 22 years
 - d. He delivered the people from the king of Mesopotamia
 - e. He and 300 men conquered the Midianites
 - f. He came from Zebulun and judged for 10 years
 - g. He slew 600 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass
 - h. He had 70 (grand)sons who rode on seven young donkeys
 - i. He conquered the Ammonites and Ephraimites; a “child of whoredom”
 - j. He came from Bethlehem and judged for 7 years
 - k. She called on Barak to war against Jabin and Siserah
 - l. He came from Issachar and judged for 23 years
6. Read Judges 16. What was the secret to Samson’s strength?
How did he lose his strength?
7. A. Read the book of Ruth. What nation did Ruth belong to?
B. Whom did Ruth marry?
8. A. What choice did she make in her life? (Ruth 1:16)
B. Is this still relevant for us?
9. What was the family connection between Ruth and the later king David? (Ruth 4:17)
10. A. In what way was Boaz a type (= foreshadowing) of Christ?
B. What was the family connection between Ruth and the Lord Jesus? (Matthew 1)

“Reapers in the field.”



11 THE UNDIVIDED KINGDOM - THREE KINGS



READ 1 & 2 SAMUEL, 1 & 2 KINGS, 1 & 2 CHRONICLES

GOD IS KING

God Himself appointed who would be the first kings: Saul, David and Solomon. They may rule Israel in the name of God, the King of Kings.

- Saul failed in his rule. He was then rejected by God.
- David was the man after God’s heart; he conducted many wars and enlarged his kingdom.
- Solomon, the prince of peace, became famous for his wisdom and riches; he built the temple at Jerusalem.

SAMUEL

Samuel was the last judge, before the first king arrived. The book of 1 Samuel begins with the moving account about Samuel’s mother Hanna. She dedicated her child to the service of the Lord in the holy place at Shiloh. Samuel stayed there as assistant to Eli, who was judge and high priest. The very aged Eli had delegated the work in the house of God to his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They did not do what pleased God, but what pleased them. As a youngster, Samuel was called by God to be a prophet (1 Samuel 3). He had to inform Eli of the punishment of God over his family. As prophet he also had to convey God’s will to the people. Besides this, Samuel was the judge who directed the people. God had not abandoned His people; He continued to remember His covenant.

When Samuel became old, he received a visit from a delegation of heads of families, who were evidently concerned about the future of Israel, partly because of the mismanagement by Samuel’s sons (1 Samuel 8:3). These elders demanded of Samuel: we desire a king, just as the other nations!

Samuel was afraid that a king would begin to supplant the God of the covenant. Nevertheless, God gave Samuel the command to install a king by means of anointing with oil. That was a customary rite at that time, by which people were installed into important offices. But anointing means more in the Bible: the anointing oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit who will rest upon the appointed person and qualify him for his task.

SAUL

Saul, the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, became Israel's first king. Although Israel was now allowed to have a king, this king had to reign with the awareness that not he, but the LORD, was the actual King of His people. The king owed unconditional obedience to this divine King. We call this form of government a theocracy, or governance by God: God reigns over His people as the actual King – by means of earthly kings. He is the King of kings. Earthly kings rule in His name. But Saul failed at this precise point. After a good start he increasingly began to do his own thing. He no longer paid any heed to what Samuel, as prophet, commanded him on God's behalf. This first incident occurred during a war against the enemies in the southwest: the Philistines. When the Philistines were so stationed that Israel felt endangered, the soldiers of Saul began to desert. However, before Saul was allowed to engage in battle with the Philistines, a sacrifice had to be offered by Samuel. When Samuel failed to arrive in a timely manner, Saul conducted the offering himself, thereby disobeying God's commands. For this reason his kingdom would not endure (1 Samuel 13).

The second occurrence was during the battle against Amalek. Saul had to totally exterminate the Amalekites because this nation had treated the people of Israel so maliciously in the wilderness (see Exodus 17:8-14). But Saul spared the king – in order to tie him behind his chariot – and he let the best of the cattle survive as war plunder. But then Saul was reproved: For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king (1 Sam 15:23). Saul's days were numbered. A fortune teller at Endor predicted his death. The next

“David fled from Saul in the wilderness.”



day, when the Philistines were at his heels, he threw himself upon his own sword. His son Jonathan, the friend of David (who would become king after Saul) and three other sons, also perished in the battle. This put an end to the reign of Saul in a tragic manner. This account also concludes the book of 1 Samuel.

DAVID

Meanwhile David had already been anointed as king by Samuel. God chose the youngest son of Jesse, of Bethlehem. A young shepherd. God overlooked his bigger brothers, because He does not look on the outward appearance, but He looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). After the anointing, the Spirit of the LORD became active over David: He filled the young man with His gifts, which he needed in battle and in governing. David arrived at the court of King Saul. Saul was increasingly possessed by an evil spirit, which resulted in bouts of anxiety and of rage. David managed to often calm him down by playing the lyre.

But David also began to play a role in the battles against the Philistines. He defeated the Philistine giant Goliath: a man who stood almost three meters tall, with a brass armor which weighed as much as 75 kilograms, and a spear with an iron point which weighed at least 18 pounds, was struck down by a small stone from David's shepherd sling. Diverse conquests over the Philistines caused David's popularity to increase. This made Saul jealous and suspicious. He was afraid that David wanted to seize his throne, and Saul made several failed attempts at killing David. David had to flee from Saul for a long period of time. We read about this in several of David's Psalms, such as Psalm 57:1, for example.

But what Saul could not do, David was able to do: he waited in faith for God's time to arrive! When David heard of the tragic death of Saul, he tore his clothes as a sign of mourning and he sang a moving song of complaint regarding Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1). Not a hint of perverse delight was to be found with him. After a short while the tribe of Judah declared him as their king. At that moment the situation in Israel was actually very chaotic: the Philistines had obtained a major victory. And there was no unity to be found amongst the people: the southern tribes followed David as king, the northern tribes had declared Ishbosheth, a son of Saul, to be their king. But Ishbosheth was soon murdered by his own army chiefs. For this act, David punished these men with death. With great tactfulness David managed to draw the northern tribes toward himself: all twelve of the tribes came to acknowledge David as their king! The unity of the kingdom was thus assured.

JERUSALEM

A very significant step was the conquest of Jerusalem, a city which was virtually impregnable because of its high elevation. By means of an aqueduct, David's men managed to enter the city and to conquer it. Now David had achieved not only unity in his domains, but also a strategically significant capital city. The conquest of Jerusalem was one of the most important events in the history of the people of Israel. Throughout the ages, the city of David on mount Zion will remain the central point of Israel's existence.

The ark (which was even captured once by the Philistines, but in a miraculous way returned to Jerusalem and thereafter sheltered in a remote place for many years) was now brought to Jerusalem amidst great jubilation.

David's conduct demonstrates that he did not wish to be a king without God, but only a king under God. Now God Himself again dwelt in the midst of His people. When David also desired to build a temple to replace the tabernacle, the prophet Nathan came to tell him in the name of God that not David, but his son Solomon, the king of peace, would be allowed to do that.

SIN AND SORROW

The kingdom of David became a territory stretching from the Red Sea in the south, far into Lebanon in the north, and far across Jordan in the east. Finally a time of rest and prosperity arrived in the great realm of King David, greater than it would ever be after his time. Neighboring nations respected the greatness of this nation. Internal conflicts – with his son Absalom and the offspring of Saul – ended up well for David. However, there were dark episodes in the life of David:

- The sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's officers. Uriah was killed in order to conceal David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11 and 12). David was convicted as the guilty party by Nathan the prophet. He became deeply remorseful. We find this detailed in Psalm 51, one of the many Psalms which David composed during his life. God granted him forgiveness, although their first child must die. Even David did not sin cheaply. Then Solomon was born. In him David received the son who, by the grace of God, would later succeed him as king.
- The numbering of the people by David. David wanted to have a head count of the number of warriors who were able to go to battle for him (2 Samuel 24:9). The Bible describes it as an act of pride. As punishment for this, three days of pestilence overcame the nation. Many people died. Also on this occasion David was very remorseful. In spite of everything, David remained the man after God's heart. A great king, who knew himself to be led by God. His death is described in 1 Kings 2:10.

SOLOMON

The book of 1 Kings opens with Solomon ascending the throne. When God asked him in a dream what gift he would like to receive, Solomon did not ask for riches, no silver or gold, no victories in war, but wisdom. This enabled Solomon to make the right decisions in difficult situations. We see his wisdom in the well-known account of the two women who argued over the live child. They both claimed to be the mother (1 Kings 3). The reign of Solomon became a period of glory. Everywhere there was peace and prosperity, indicated in the Bible by the word "shalom" (= peace). Solomon completed the royal palace, which his father had already begun. In Megiddo he ordered huge stables to be built for his cavalry. He made the realm even more prosperous with foreign trading. Solomon's riches and wisdom made him legendary. He wrote many proverbs and songs (1 Kings 4:29-34): the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Solomon was also the one who gave command for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. By our standards not a large building: about 30 by 10 by 15 meters, but it had a large front court. The temple was certainly expensive, because much gold and cedar wood was put to use. The layout was the same as that of the tabernacle. With great feasting the ark was brought from its temporary tent to the temple and the dedication took place. Solomon prayed: *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain (understand) thee; how much less this house that I have builded?* (1 Kings 8:27). Things were going well for Israel and its king. The queen of Sheba, from southern Arabia, exclaimed in amazement, upon her visit, that Solomon's wisdom and riches exceeded her boldest expectations (1 Kings 10:6 and 7). But riches and prosperity are also dangerous. Solomon took many princesses from pagan nations as wives. They brought along their idols and idol worshippers. And all this after the LORD had commanded in Deuteronomy 17:17: *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.* See also 1 Kings 11: 1-13. The LORD appeared to Solomon twice in order to announce the punishment for this sin: the kingdom would be divided. (1 Kings 11:11). Thus ended the life of the third king of Israel. Solomon died at a great age and was buried in Jerusalem.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you learn about Samuel's mother when you read 1 Samuel 1 and 2:1-11?
2. A. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-11. By whom was Samuel called?
B. What offices did Samuel hold?
3. What do we know about the sons of the high priest Eli? (1 Samuel 2:12-17)
4. A. Why did the people want a king? (1 Samuel 8:5)

- B. What did the Lord say about this to Samuel? (1 Samuel 8:7)
 - C. What is a theocracy?
5.
 - A. Why was Saul not allowed to remain king? (1 Samuel 15:23b).
 - B. What did Saul do when the Lord refused to answer him? (1 Samuel 28)
 - C. What does this history teach us regarding astrology and predicting futures?
 6.
 - A. Who was David's soul friend? (1 Samuel 18:1)
 - B. What do we read about David's flight from Saul in: Psalm 18:1; Psalm 54:2; Psalm 57:1; Psalm 59:1?
 7.
 - A. Read 2 Samuel 1:17-27. About whom was David grieving in this song of complaint?
 - B. What does this tell us about David's attitude towards his persecutor?
 8. In 2 Samuel 11 and 12 we read about a dark episode in David's life. Find Psalm 51. What was David asking for in this Psalm?
 9.
 - A. The time of Solomon's reign is referred to with the word "shalom". What does this mean for that time period?
 - B. What does this word teach us about the future of all true believers? Read Isaiah 9:1-6.
 10.
 - A. Why can riches and prosperity be dangerous?
 - B. How did that become apparent in Solomon's life?
 - C. How did God punish this? (1 Kings 11:11)

"Jerusalem upon Mount Zion."



12 THE KINGDOM OF

THE TEN TRIBES



READ 1 & 2 KINGS, 1 & 2 CHRONICLES

DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

Due to objections against the excessively high taxes of Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, a separatist movement arose under Jeroboam: ten tribes separated themselves from the house of David. The kingdom of the ten tribes, also referred to as Ephraim (or, as Israel - to distinguish it from Judah, the kingdom of the two tribes) was hereby created (1 Kings 12). It has become a sad story. One continuous tale of sin, unfaithfulness toward God's covenant, and idol worship. Ultimately, this would culminate in removal of a large portion of the populace into exile. We read about the new kingdom of Israel in the books of 1 and 2 Kings.

Remarkably, there is no mention of the kings of Israel in the two books of Chronicles (the content of which largely runs parallel to the content of the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings). There was not one God-fearing king amongst them. Only Judah is written about here, which had both godless and God-fearing kings. Out of this kingdom the promised Redeemer would eventually arise. In 1 and 2 Chronicles we also see that the Bible relates the history from a very unusual perspective: from the standpoint of God's dealings towards His people! The authors of the books of Kings are concerned with the relationship between God and the people of His covenant.

SOME KINGS OF EPHRAIM

Jeroboam (931 – 910)

Jeroboam was the first king of Ephraim (or Israel). He reigned for 22 years. He is mentioned in 62 texts of the Bible, of which as many as 60 are about one single event and God's response towards it: the launching of the worship of the calves in Dan and Bethel.

Jeroboam wanted to prevent having his people travel to Jerusalem repeatedly in order to fulfill their religious obligations there. For that reason he erected two images of calves in

Dan and in Bethel. The inhabitants of Israel were now told to worship God around these two idols. This, of course, was contrary to the second commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image (Ex 20:4). It is understandable that the author of the books of Kings would focus on this so strongly: we are shown how terribly disobedient the king and the people were against the LORD. (1 Kings 12 and 13) Jeroboam was the first king of whom it must be said: he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord!

Ahab (874 – 853)

King Ahab did even worse. He married a princess from Phoenicia (a small kingdom along the sea coast, north of Israel, with two famous port cities, Tyre and Sidon). She was Jezebel, a woman who exerted a very bad influence upon the king. And not only upon the king, but upon the entire nation. She introduced the worship of Baal, a fertility god, from her native country into Israel, and promoted it forcefully. She did everything in her power to outlaw the worship of the God of the covenant. She had a heartfelt loathing for the prophets of the LORD and managed to get her husband Ahab to think likewise. Her name has become a symbol of tempting idolatry. Consequently Revelation 2:20 refers to the deceitfulness of idolatry by her name, Jezebel. We find an assessment of Ahab in 1 King 21:25 and 26.

Jehu (841 – 814)

King Jehu must carry out the judgment of God over the house of Ahab. Jezebel met her death in a gruesome manner. Jehu put an end to the Baal worship, but allowed the worship of the idols at Dan and Bethel to continue.

Jeroboam II (780 – 751)

King Jeroboam II was king for no less than 41 years, including the ten years he reigned together with his father Joash. Because his archenemy Aram (= Syria) had his hands full dealing with the rebellion of the rising force of Assyria, Jeroboam II managed to remove Israel from the sphere of influence of Syria. But both king and nation continued to pursue their own evil ways. From an economic standpoint, he was certainly one of the most successful kings of Israel: great prosperity was enjoyed in the country and the people reconquered what had formerly been their territories from their enemies. Yet the Bible only commits seven verses to the period of his reign (2 Kings 14:23-29). This indicates with which balances matters are weighed in the Bible!

Pekah (739 – 732)

King Pekah reigned over Israel for seven years. He was the king who made a covenant with king Rezin of Syria against the Assyrians. These covenant partners were, however, defeated and the Assyrians carried away the first group of Israelites into exile in Assyria.

Hoshea (731 – 723)

King Hoshea rebelled against Assyria and that spelled the end of the kingdom of the ten tribes. Assyrian armies came and destroyed Ephraim. After a siege of three years, Samaria, the capital city, was taken by Shalmaneser. The populace was deported to Mesopotamia and Media, never to return as a nation to the Promised Land.

Other civilizations were then moved into the depopulated terrain, to mingle with the scarce population which had been left behind. From this blend the Samaritans originated.

SEVERAL PROPHETS FROM EPHRAIM

Was Israel then not warned? They certainly were. And emphatically so! God warned them by means of the prophets.

There are many misconceptions regarding the role of the prophets. They are often viewed as predictors of the future, who explain precisely what all is going to occur in the future. They did indeed prophesy regarding the future of Israel, but the primary task of the prophets has been: the passing along of the words of God! The Hebrew term for prophet is **nabi**: that means someone who speaks on behalf of another. A prophet is a messenger of God. God has used the prophets to warn the people, to make them feel His anger against the sins of the nation and the people, the authorities and the subjects and to announce His judgments. But also to promise a new future: a new Kingdom and a new King, Jesus Christ.

Elijah

An important prophet amongst the ten tribes was Elijah. He prophesied during the reign of King Ahab. A not so pleasant meeting between king and prophet is described in 1 Kings 18:17 and 18. A decisive event was to occur on Mount Carmel. There the king, the people and the priests of Baal were called together to witness a judgment of God: two altars were erected. The God who would answer by fire would be recognized as God. The god Baal gave no sign of life and was ridiculed by Elijah. But when Elijah prayed to his God, fire came down from heaven, which consumed the sacrifice. The people have understood the message: The LORD is God (1 Kings 18:38, 39)!

The obedience to God was short-lived: a short while later the people went their own ways again. Elijah is a type (a prefiguring) of the last prophet John the Baptist, who in his preaching announced God's judgment upon those who refuse to repent. But who also announced the very near (still during his own lifetime) arrival of the promised Redeemer, the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Elisa

Elisha succeeded Elijah. Elisha acted as a prophet during the time of king Joram and performed many miracles, for example:

- At Jericho, water was healed
- A child was raised from death
- Naaman was healed of his leprosy.

It is a visible proclamation of the might and power of God, who wants to demonstrate to an unfaithful nation that He desires to be a merciful and gracious God. By the miracles which he performed, Elisha was a type of the Lord Jesus, who performs many miracles in order to reinforce the preaching of the Kingdom of God as a kingdom of peace, mercy and grace.

Amos

Amos was prophet at the time of Jeroboam II. Amos fiercely opposed the empty and hollow worship customs, and the gross injustice which prevailed in Israel. We find his prophesies in the book which bears his name.

Hosea

Another prophet from the same time was Hosea. He was commanded by God to marry an adulterous wife: their marriage symbolizes the relationship between God and His people. As adulterous as Hosea's wife was, equally unfaithful was Israel towards God. And, in spite of all, God desires to love this people!

*“ Present day image
of Elijah near Mount
Carmel. ”*



QUESTIONS

1. How does the Bible describe Israel's history?
2. Match ten kings of the ten tribes (= Israel) to their description:
 1. JEROBEAM
 2. NADAB
 3. BAESHA
 4. ELAH
 5. ZIMRI
 6. OMRI
 7. AHAB
 8. AHAZIAH
 9. JORAM
 10. JEHU
 11. JOAHAZ
 12. JOASH
 13. JEROBEAM II
 14. ZACHARIA
 15. SHALLUM
 16. MENAHEM
 17. PEKAHIAH
 18. PEKAH
 19. HOSEA
3. What phrase is often repeated in the accounts of the kings of Israel? (1 Kings 15:26,34; 16:7, 19, 25, 30; 2 Kings 3:2, 17:2)
 - a. He made a covenant with king Rezin of Syria (2 Kings 15)
 - b. He was killed by his successor Shallum (2 Kings 15)
 - c. Rebellion against Assyria; end of the ten tribes (2 Kings 17)
 - d. His wife was Jezebel, she promoted Baal worship (1 Kings 16-22)
 - e. He reigned two years, son of Menahem (2 Kings 15)
 - f. He reigned 41 years; economically a good time for Israel (2 Kings 14)
 - g. He was a son of Jehu, reigned 17 years (2 Kings 13)
 - h. He introduced the worship of calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 11-14)
 - i. He was a son of king Ahab, reigned at Samaria (1 Kings 22)
 - j. He ended the worship of Baal (2 Kings 9)
4. A. What was the primary task of a prophet?
B. Which prophets prophesied in the kingdom of the ten tribes?
5. What did King Ahab call the prophet Elijah? (1 Kings 18:17)
6. A. What did the people shout out on Carmel? (1 Kings 18:39).
B. Read 2 Kings 2:1-12. What was Elijah's end like?

7. About what miracle do we read in 2 Kings 5?
8. In what way were Elijah and Elisha types (prefiguring) of the Lord Jesus?
9. During the reign of which kings did Hosea and Amos prophesy?
(Hosea 1:1 and Amos 1:1)
10. Israel sinned much and often. But what do we read concerning the LORD? (Hosea 14:5)

*“Jerusalem upon
Mount Zion.”*



13 THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH



JUDAH

In general, the Bible speaks more positively about the kingdom of the two tribes than about the kingdom of the ten tribes. Judah – as the two tribes are referred to – at least had some kings who served the LORD. Yet there were also a number of kings who acted according to their own tastes.

Both 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles tell us about the kings of Judah. In the latter two books there is a little more emphasis on the temple service.

SEVERAL KINGS OF JUDAH

Rehoboam (931 – 915)

The first king of Judah was Solomon’s son Rehoboam. He became king over the undivided realm, but this was torn in two immediately at the start of his reign because he raised the level of taxation to an unaffordable degree. After this he was king over the two tribes only. During his reign pagan sacrificial mounds were erected. In order to worship the idols, also dedicated stones and dedicated posts were erected and trees were dedicated to pagan worship. Sexual immorality played a large role in this worship, in order to assure the fertility of fields, cattle and the people.

Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, and Jotham (911 – 735)

Kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, and Jotham did not put an end to the rituals on the sacrificial mounds. Yet we are told they did what was right in the sight of the LORD.

Hezekiah (715 – 686)

King Hezekiah was a God-fearing king. He strongly promoted the service of the LORD and attempted to eradicate idol worship.

He also put an end to the veneration of the brass serpent, to which Judah had become

accustomed.

Hezekiah's sickness and healing are a well-known story (2 Kings 20).

Although Hezekiah was not perfect either – more than once, he sought his safety by calling on Egypt when Assyria became a threat – yet 2 Kings 18:5 and 6 reveal about him that: *He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.*

Josiah (637 – 608)

King Josiah also looks very favorable compared to the other kings. He exerted great zeal towards the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. A role of the law which was found during this process – probably with large portions of the book of Deuteronomy – became the heart of the reformation: the temple service and the life of the people again came under the influence of the words of God.

2 Kings 23:25 states this about Josiah: *And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.*

Joram, Ahaz and Manasseh (848 – 640)

Hezekiah and Josiah were positive exceptions. Of many kings it has been recorded in the books of Kings that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. But Joram, Ahaz, Manasseh (Hezekiah's son!) were actually evil in the extreme. Of Manasseh it is known that he came to conversion in a prison cell during his exile in Babylon. Partly because of these kings, things went downhill with Judah; from bad to worse. The judgment of God came upon Judah. It was accomplished by means of a very rapidly rising power at that time: Babylon.

“Excavation in Jerusalem. A spring from the time of King Hezekiah.”



On two occasions, large groups of people were carried away to Babylon. In this way the populace was deprived of its leaders. And in 586 before Christ, Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple was leveled to the ground. The entire nation went into captivity (except for some of the very poorest people).

SEVERAL PROPHETS IN JUDAH

Also in the kingdom of the two tribes, Judah, various prophets arose, who were sent by God to warn the ungodly people who did not keep God's law; as well as to encourage those who feared God. Several of them are very well known, because extensive books of the Bible are dedicated to their prophesies.

Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed God's Word at the time of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He cried out against the worship of idols, which was very commonplace. He warned against the parties which began early in the day already, and continued until the late hours, and where the wine flowed freely. He also criticized flirtation and the fashion trends of the women of Jerusalem, as well as the prosperity of the rich at the expense of the poor. Isaiah pointed to the anger of God against unrighteousness: the rich accumulated house after house and field upon field; yet they had no regard for the little ones, widows and orphans were oppressed, that which is evil was called good and the good was called evil. Therefore Isaiah must announce God's punishment: exile. Nevertheless, God would see to it that the entire nation was not destroyed. A remnant, a survival group, would return. One of Isaiah's sons carried this promise of return in his father's name: he is called Shear-Jashub, which means "a remnant repents" or "a remnant returns". Not because they are better than the others. No, God had elected them. For that reason God will also give them a new heart, and that heart will once again enquire after God.

Isaiah may even point to the future kingdom of peace, which the LORD, the God of the covenant, causes to come by the Messiah, in spite of the sins of the people (Isaiah 11). Immanuel (Isaiah 7) is Jesus Christ. He will come in order to give Himself as THE LAMB of God, Which will take away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53).

Glad tidings

Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. These words of comfort also resound in the second section of the book: Isaiah 40-66. Many years, about a century, before the people of Judah went into exile, Isaiah was enabled to speak prophetic words of comfort to these people in exile. God will punish Israel by sending them into exile, but He will also

cause the people's descendants to return to the Promised Land. Then a new period of time will commence. The most remarkable aspect of the prophecies of Isaiah are the four songs of the Servant of the LORD, Who suffers as a substitute for others (see Isaiah 53). Here we recognize an announcement of the Messiah who is to come: Jesus Christ!

The door of salvation is also opened for the other nations: *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else* (Isa 45:22).

In the New Testament this message will become even more visible: God intends the salvation of the whole world through Israel!

Zephaniah

Zephaniah prophesied at the time of Josiah. In spite of the good reign of King Josiah, there was evidently still much that was faulty: the idols were being served and priests desecrated the temple.

Zephaniah announced the day of the LORD: on that day the judgment of God would not only affect the heathens (as the Jews believed), but all the ungodly.

Nevertheless, Zephaniah also proclaimed the promise: *I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord* (Zephaniah 3:12).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah – who prophesied a century later than Isaiah, from the time of Josiah's reign until the exile – also directed his message against the sins of Judah.

In spite of the book of the law which was found at the time of Josiah and which led to a reformation in those days, the people continued in their sins: unrighteousness and oppression, adultery and theft, murder and idolatry. They were of the opinion that they could combine these sins with a "pious" habit of temple attendance.

“ But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength. ”



Although it was by no means always easy for him, Jeremiah must announce the judgment of God, just as the prophet Habakkuk did. The city of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed and the people of Judah would be carried away into exile by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Once the judgment had been carried out, there was nothing left for Jeremiah to do but to sing his mournful Lamentations about his people and nation upon the heaps of rubble in Jerusalem.

But ... a new time is coming! Jeremiah may also announce that. Chapter 31 abounds with God's grace and God's faithfulness.

It had also been announced by the other prophets already: a new time will come and a branch shall come forth out of the root (a tree trunk, which has little promise of growth) of Jesse. If after reading Jeremiah 31 you read Isaiah 9:1-6, you will know what that new time is going to look like; and you will also know around whom this will all become reality. That can only be one Person: Jesus Christ, God's Son, our LORD!

QUESTIONS

1. Which kings in the kingdom of the two tribes (= Judah) served the LORD?
(1 Kings 15 & 22; 2 Kings 15; 18-20; 22)
2. A. Which king served the Lord at the end of his reign? (2 Chronicles 33)
B. Where did he come to conversion?
C. What makes this story relevant for us?
3. What do we read about kings who "walked in the ways of the LORD"? (2 Kings 15)
4. What did Hezekiah do when he heard that he was about to die? (2 Kings 20)
5. a. What was found during the restoration of the temple? (2 Kings 22:8)
b. What was King Josiah's reaction? (2 Kings 22:11-13)
6. a. Which prophet announced the exile and also spoke words of comfort already?
b. How did the prophet announce the coming of the Messiah? (Isaiah 7:14)
c. For whom is the salvation announced? (Isaiah 45:22)
7. a. In Zephaniah 3:12, the Lord permitted Zephaniah to proclaim a promise. Quote this promise.
b. What characteristic of true faith do we read of here?
8. Jeremiah had to pronounce the judgment but he may also prophesy something else. Read Jeremiah 31 and then Isaiah 9:1-6.

9. The promised child is Jesus Christ, God's Son, our LORD.
What rests on His shoulders and what is He called in Isaiah 9:6?
10. What can be said concerning those who continue in sin in spite of warnings?
Lamentations 3:42, Psalm 81:9-12. What does this tell us today?

"Jerusalem, Israel."



14 GONE AND BACK



READ DANIEL, ESTHER, EZRA, NEHEMIAH

IN EXILE

The people of Judah, of the kingdom of the two tribes, were in exile in Babylon for seventy years. In contrast to the people of the ten tribes (who were carried away to Assyria more than 100 years earlier and dispersed across all the territories in the entire kingdom of Assyria) the people of the two tribes were allowed to live together in Babylon. God sent several prophets to the people in exile: Ezekiel and Daniel. But even Isaiah, a century earlier, had already spoken prophetic words of comfort for the time that the populace would have to remain in exile (see lesson 13).

DANIEL

From Psalm 137 it is evident that life in exile was not easy. That becomes clear in the book of Daniel. The book of Daniel relates the account of one of the young members of the Jewish nobility who were led into exile: Daniel.

Daniel and his friends were compelled to adapt to the Babylonian lifestyle:

- They were made to eat foods which were incompatible with their dietary laws
- Their names, which remind them of the God of Israel, were changed: the name Daniel (= God is my Judge) was changed to Belteshazzar (= god Bel, protect the king)
- They refused to honor idols. (The reason why the three friends were cast into a fiery furnace, where God protected them. Daniel 3)

The book of Daniel contains a historical account about the time in Babylon (Daniel 1-6), but also various visions which the prophet Daniel received (images which are seen while awake, without others around them being aware of this) (Daniel 7-12).

These visions provide an impression of world events of that time. The passages are not easy to follow. Much use is made of symbolic numbers, of unfamiliar animals, of symbolic language. We call these passages of the Bible apocalyptic (= disclosure of mysteries). As difficult as these passages may be, one thing becomes clear: the mighty powers of earth who destroy everything, are going to be vanquished and the Messianic kingdom of God will triumph. That is the comforting message at a time of persecution and oppression, throughout the ages.

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

One of the people who was also carried away to Babylon was Ezekiel. He was descended from a priestly family, but was carried away before he could begin to exercise the priestly office (men had to be 30 years old for this). In Babylon he was called to be a prophet.

In chapters 36 to 48 of the book Ezekiel, he prophesied about what would take place after the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel often did this by using symbolic scenes.

Thus, in chapter 37 – the prophecy about the valley of withered dead bones – he indicated that Israel, now to be compared to these bones, would once again come to life. It shall become a people which will begin to serve God with a new heart, a heart in which there is love to God and God's laws. A heart, a new heart, which God promises to give.

RETURN

The promises of return became reality. In the first half of the sixth century before Christ, Babylon was still the supreme power. But meanwhile another force appeared on the world stage: King Cyrus, also called Koresh, the king of Persia.



“Life in captivity was not easy.”

Cyrus managed to unite the kingdom of the Medes with that of the Persians, and then attacked Babylon. Babylon fell in 539.

It fit within the framework of Cyrus' political ambitions to allow the Jewish exiles to return to their own land. In 536 many did return.

A certain man named Zerubbabel, a prince from the lineage of David, was the political leader. A certain Joshua, grandson of the last high priest before the captivity, was the spiritual leader of those who returned.

Once back in the city of David, they first erected an altar for burnt sacrifices upon the foundations of the destroyed temple. After this they began the reconstruction of the temple complex: the second temple.

The Samaritans offered their assistance, but the Jews declined this, because the Samaritans were no longer the pure people of God. They were a mixed race of Israelites and heathen nations. The Judeans feared that otherwise they would again be contaminated with strange influences. The Samaritans were angry because of this rejection and attempted to make the reconstruction of the temple as difficult as possible. They went to the Persian king and accused the Judeans of plotting rebellion. And upon the command of King Darius, the successor of Cyrus, the rebuilding came to a halt temporarily.

ESTHER

But not all the Jews returned to the land of God's promise. Many had established their livelihood in Babylon, which they did not want to exchange for a new existence in the destroyed and plundered land of Canaan.

The story which is described in the Biblical book of Esther, took place in Persia (the center of world power after the fall of Babylon) amongst the Jews who did not return to their own land. Life there, amongst strange people, was not always easy for the Jews. Haman, the Agagite (a descendent of Amalek!), attempted to destroy the Jewish people in Babylon. Esther and her foster father Mordecai managed to reveal these plans.

A counter-decree provided the Jewish community the right to defend themselves against the law designed to annihilate them. On the Purim feast the Jews remember their close rescue (pur = the lot, which would be cast to determine the day on which the Jewish people would be destroyed).

REBUILDING OF CITY AND TEMPLE

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

In 520 BC God sent two prophets to Jerusalem: Haggai and Zechariah. In discouragement, the people had given up on the rebuilding of the temple. Both of these prophets exerted all their skills to resume the construction of the temple, and thereby to also contribute to the spiritual revival. Haggai pointed to the materialism of the people, which only leads to: eating but never being full, a wallet with a hole in it (Haggai 1:3-6). His remedy was: first think about the things of God, and all other things will be provided for you. During the time when Haggai was prophet, the temple construction was completed. In 516 BC the new temple was solemnly dedicated. And although this temple was much less glorious than that of Solomon, this was the temple in which the promised Messiah would one day come.

Therefore Haggai stated: *and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. (...) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, (...) and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts* (Hag 2:7-10).

The prophet Zechariah had eight night visions, which related to the situation of the returning people and which served to encourage the people. Zechariah also spoke of the promise of the Messiah: Hag 2:8-10 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; (...) behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass* (Zechariah 9:9).

EZRA

The Jews in captivity erected synagogues, places of assembly around the Thora (the first five books of the Bible, which contain the law or instruction of God) at many places. There the people were instructed by scribes. Actually, these scribes took the place of the priests and Levites who formerly also had the task of explaining the law of God. Now that the outward structural bases of God's people (the temple service and the throne of David) had perished, it became critically important to precisely follow the dietary and hygienic laws. Under the Old Covenant God had ordered them to be entirely different from the nations. These laws, after all, were the means of bringing that into practice.

One of the scribes was the Priest Ezra. He lived in Babylon, long after the main return (which occurred even before his birth) of many Jews to Jerusalem. In the Bible book which bears his name, Ezra did describe the account of the return of a large group of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem in 536 BC. Jerusalem then was a wilderness and lay in rubble.

In the second portion of the book (Ezra 7-10) Ezra describes his return to Jerusalem in 457 BC (about 80 years after the main return) along with a group of about 1500 exiles who finally returned to Canaan. Ezra departed with power of attorney from the Persian king, under whose rule the returning Jews remained. He was delegated to assess the situation in Jerusalem and to provide assistance if necessary.

He was even provided with silver and gold for the sacrificial worship, and he was allowed to call upon the royal treasury to supply what was necessary for the temple. Besides, he was to appoint rulers and judges amongst his people. Ezra also instituted some reforms among the Jews which, amongst other things, meant that the pagan wives were sent away. In his day, Ezra was the spiritual leader of the Jewish people who returned to the land of their fathers.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer of the Persian king, went twice from Babylon to Jerusalem to give assistance to his people. The first time was in 445 BC (so about 12 years after the return of Ezra). We do not know whether he ever returned to Babylon after the second trip. Under Nehemiah's leadership the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem was completed. The Bible book Nehemiah describes this.

Life after exile is characterized by a renewed focus on the Thora, which the LORD had given to His people. Nehemiah was the political leader of the returned Jewish people.

“Scroll.”



MALACHI

Malachi was the last prophet of the Old Testament. He prophesied from about 430 BC. He rebuked the people for disregarding the sacrifice regulations: the people offered crippled animals for sacrifice. To him that indicated contempt for the service of the LORD, and he said: Bring that to your ruler (Malachi 1:8). They would not dare to do that. But do they dare to bring such tainted sacrifices to God? How ungrateful! Many people had more respect for politics than for God. Malachi prophesied of a coming day of judgment which would be preceded by the coming of a herald like Elijah. Then men will acknowledge: it does matter whether you serve God or not (Malachi 3:18).

BETWEEN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

Malachi closed off the list of Old Testament prophets. After him God ceased speaking thus until the time of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist (New Testament, Luke 1). This does not mean that nothing occurred. Although the last 400 years before the birth of Christ are not described in the Bible (except the visions about the future in Daniel), yet we know about this period from historical sources.

The Persians – under King Darius (522-486) – managed to extend their power all the way to Greece. But then the Greeks struck back: Alexander the Great managed to defeat the Persians. A huge proportion of the then-known world came under his rule. Greek culture was spread everywhere: language, ethics and customs, religion and philosophy. We call this spread of their culture Hellenism.

After Alexander's death the realm was divided under four generals: in this way Syria and

Israel came to be governed by the Seleucids. One of them, Antiochus Epiphanes, ruled with a hard and cruel fist. He even enforced that a pig must be sacrificed to the Greek chief god Zeus in the temple court. A pig is an unclean animal to the Jews. Therefore they did not want to enter the defiled temple anymore. Then, in 167 BC, Antiochus caused the temple to be shut down. It is not impossible that the prophetic accounts of Daniel 7:25 and 8:23 and 24 make reference to him.

The Jews came under heavy pressure in Israel. An old priest, Matthias, managed to start a resistance war, which was then further conducted by his five sons. One of them, Judas, had the nickname Maccabee which means: battle axe. The resistance war is named after him, the war of the Maccabees. After some years they managed to conquer Jerusalem and purify the temple. They wanted to re-commence the worship service as rapidly as possible. Although there was actually not enough pure oil available, they lit the candlestick in the holy place. By a miracle this candlestick kept burning until the time came when they again had more oil to replenish the lamps. This occasion is still always celebrated by the Jews in the Hanukkah feast (Hanukkah = dedication).

THE COMING OF THE REDEEMER

In 63 BC the Romans became the dominant power. They ruled over Israel for about 150 years. And during that time of Roman rule, prophecies were fulfilled. The promised Messiah was born. God came to erect His Kingdom upon earth.

But that is a following phase. It is the history of the coming of the Redeemer. It is the account of what we refer to as the New Covenant: the New Testament.

QUESTIONS

1. How long did the exile last?
2. A. What Babylonian names did Daniel and his friends receive? (Daniel 1)
B. Why did the Israelite names have to be changed to Babylonian names?
3. A. What is evident from the conduct of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1 and 3?
B. Read Ephesians 6:12. What does that mean for the Christian in our day?
4. A. With what cry of king Nebuchadnezzar did the event in the valley of Durah end? (Daniel 3)
B. What command was given by the king?
C. With what exclamation of King Darius did the event at the lions' den end? (Daniel 6)

“Rebuilding of the temple.”



- D. What command did the king give after this?
5. A. The vision of the valley of withered dead bones demonstrates that one day all will be made right again. Read Ezekiel 37. What impossible task was given to the prophet? (Ezekiel 37:4)
B. Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. What message does this contain for us?
6. A. Read Ezekiel 36:26 and 27. What is meant here by a new heart?
B. What connection is there with John 3:1-16?
(See also key words: heart and regeneration) What is necessary for every person?
7. A. At which feast do the Jews commemorate their delivery?
B. Which book of the Bible is read upon that occasion? Esther 9:28-32
8. A. What was built first upon the return from exile?
B. In Haggai's time the rebuilding of the temple was completed. What is commented about the new temple? (Haggai 2:10)
9. A. Why were the Samaritans not permitted to help with the re-building?
B. They wanted to hinder the re-building. Can we say that this history repeats itself in our day?
10. A. What does Malachi prophesy?
B. What does really matter in our lives? (Malachi 3:18)
C. What does Malachi 4:2 point to? How only can a person be saved? (Acts 4:10-12)





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