

MALACHI [MAL ah kie] (my messenger)

Old Testament prophet and author of the prophetic book, which bears his name. Nothing is known about Malachi's life except the few facts that may be inferred from his prophecies. He apparently prophesied after the CAPTIVITY, during the time when NEHEMIAH was leading the people to rebuild Jerusalem's wall and recommit themselves to following God's Law. The people's negligence in paying tithes to God was condemned by both Nehemiah and Malachi (Neh 13:10-14; Mal 3:8-10).

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MALACHI, BOOK OF

A short prophetic book of the Old Testament written to rebuke the people of Israel for their shallow worship practices. The name comes from the Hebrew word Malachi (1:1), meaning "my messenger" or "messenger of Jehovah."

Structure of the Book.

Portions of Malachi are written in the format of a debate, unlike any other book of the Bible. God first makes a statement of truth that is then denied by the people. God then refutes their argument in great detail, restating and proving the truth of His original statement (1:2-7; 2:10-17; 3:7-10). Malachi also uses questions and answers freely to focus his accusations toward the priesthood as well as the people. These features make Malachi one of the most argumentative books of the Bible.

Authorship and Date.

Some scholars believe the word Malachi should be interpreted as a description ("my messenger") rather than as the name of a specific person. This line of reasoning concludes that the book was written by an unknown author. But no other book of prophecy in the Old Testament was written anonymously. Although nothing else is known about this person, the weight of tradition has assumed the book was written by a prophet named Malachi. The prophecy can be specifically dated at about 450 B.C.

Historical Setting.

Malachi was addressed to the nation of Israel about 100 years after its return from captivity in Babylon. At first the people had been enthusiastic about rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple and restoring their system of worship. But their zeal soon began to wane. They wondered about God's love for them as His Chosen People. They began to offer defective animals as sacrifices and to withhold their tithes and offerings. Malachi was written to call the people back to authentic worship of their Redeemer God.

Theological Contributions.

The prophecy of Malachi is noted for its vivid portrayal of the love of God as well as His might and power. Israel needed to be reminded of these truths at a time when widespread doubt had dashed its expectations of the Messiah.

Special Considerations.

Malachi leaves us with the feeling that the story is not yet finished, that God still has promises to fulfill on behalf of His people. After Malachi came 400 long years of silence. But when the time was right, heaven would burst forth in song at the arrival of the Messiah.

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NAHUM [NAY hum] (compassionate)

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Nahum whose prophesy pronounced God's judgment against the mighty nation of Assyria.

Very little is known about Nahum. His hometown, Elkosh in the nation of Israel (Nah 1:1), has not been located. But he must have lived some time shortly before 612 B.C., the year when Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, was destroyed by the Babylonians. Nahum announced that the judgment of God would soon be visited upon this pagan city.

The Book of Nahum is similar to the Book of Obadiah, since both these prophecies were addressed against neighboring nations. Obadiah spoke the word of the Lord against Edom, while Nahum prophesied against Assyria. Both messages contained a word of hope for God's Covenant People, since they announced that Israel's enemies would soon be overthrown.

While little is known about Nahum the man, his prophetic writing is one of the most colorful in the Old Testament. The Book of Nahum is marked by strong imagery, a sense of suspense, and vivid language, with biting puns and deadly satire. Nahum was a man who understood God's goodness, but he could also describe the terror of the Lord against His enemies.

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NAHUM, BOOK OF

A short prophetic book of the Old Testament that foretells the destruction of the nation of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh.

Structure of the Book.

The book opens with a brief identification of the prophet Nahum. Then it launches into a psalm of praise that celebrates the power and goodness of God. This comforting picture is contrasted with the evil deeds of the Assyrians. With graphic language, Nahum presents a prophetic picture of the coming judgment of God. He informs the nation of Assyria that its days as a world power are drawing to a close. In an oracle of woe, the prophet describes Nineveh as a "bloody city, full of lies and robbery" (3:1). But soon the city of Nineveh will be laid waste, and Assyria will crumble before the judgment of God.

Authorship and Date. This book was written by a prophet known as "Nahum the Elkoshite" (1:1). This brief identification tells us all we know about this spokesman for the Lord. Even the location of his home, Elkosh, is uncertain, although some scholars believe he may have lived in northern Judah. The book can be dated with reasonable accuracy. Nineveh fell, as Nahum predicted, about 612 B.C. therefore, the book was probably written shortly before this time.

Historical Setting.

For more than 100 years before Nahum's day, Assyria had been one of the dominant powers of the ancient world. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyrian forces in 722 B.C. Some prophets taught that this pagan nation was used as an instrument of God's judgment against His wayward people. But now it was Assyria's turn to feel the force of God's wrath. The armies of Nabopolassar of Babylon stormed Nineveh in 612 B.C. The entire Assyrian Empire crumbled three years later under the relentless assault of this aggressive Babylonian ruler. Thus, as Nahum prophesied, Assyria's day of dominance ended with their humiliation by a foreign power.

Theological Contribution.

This book teaches the sure judgment of God against those who oppose His will and abuse His people. Acts of inhumanity are acts against God, and He will serve as the ultimate and final judge. God sometimes uses a pagan nation as an instrument of His judgment, just as He used the Assyrians against the nation of Israel. But this does not excuse the pagan nation from God's laws and requirements. It will be judged by the same standards of righteousness and holiness, which God applies to all the other people of the world.

Special Considerations.

By a strange irony, the city in Galilee most closely associated with the ministry of Jesus was Capernaum. The name Capernaum in the Hebrew language means "the village of Nahum."

Some people wonder about the gloomy, pessimistic tone of the Book of Nahum. How can this picture of

God's wrath and judgment be reconciled with the God of grace and love whom we meet in the New Testament? As the sovereign, all-powerful God, He has the right to work His purpose in the world. Judgment against sin is a part of the work, which He must do in order to remain a just and holy God.

Nahum's announcement of God's approaching judgment also carries a call for holy living and faithful proclamation by God's Covenant People. Our work is to carry the message of His salvation to those who are surely doomed unless they turn to God in repentance and faith.

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JOEL [JOE uhl] (Jehovah is God)

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Joel. A citizen of Jerusalem, he spoke often of the priests and their duties (Joel 1:9,13-14,16). For this reason, many scholars believe he may have been a Temple prophet. He also had an ear for nature (Joel 1:4-7), and included imagery from agriculture and the natural world in his messages.

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JOEL BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament that predicted the outpouring of the spirit of God on all people—a prophecy fulfilled several centuries later on the Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21). The title of the book comes from its author, the prophet Joel, whose name means Jehovah is God.

For an outline of the book see Joel

Structure of the Book.

The three brief chapters of this book are divided into two major sections of about equal length. In the first section (1:1-2:11) the prophet Joel introduces himself and speaks to his readers about their need to turn from their sins. The speaker in the second part of the book (2:12-3:21) is the all-powerful God, who warns His people about the approaching Day of Judgment and assures them of His abiding presence, in spite of their unworthiness.

In the first section of the book, Joel calls attention to a devastating swarm of locusts that had recently swept through the land (1:4). These destructive locusts stripped the foliage from all trees, shrubs, and crops (1:7). The people and livestock of Judah were facing the threat of starvation because of the famine that followed this invasion (1:15-18). As bad as this natural catastrophe had been, the prophet declares it will be as nothing in comparison to the coming day of the Lord. This is the day of JUDGMENT, when God will vent His wrath upon His sinful and disobedient people. Joel also informs the people that this terrible day can be avoided. The way of escape is to turn to God "with all your heart, with fasting, and with mourning" (2:12). After Joel delivers his pleas for repentance, God Himself speaks to His wayward people. In spite of the famine, He declares that there will be plenty to eat in the days of blessing to come (2:18-19). This day of renewal will be marked by the outpouring of His spirit on all people (2:28-29). All the nations of the world will take notice as God gathers His people together in the holy city of Jerusalem to serve as their ruler: "Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation" (3:20).

Authorship and Date.

The author of this book was the prophet Joel, who identifies himself in the introduction as "the son of Pethuel" (1:1). This is all we know about this spokesman for the Lord. From evidence in the book itself, we can assume that he knew a great deal about Jerusalem, Judah's capital city, and the rituals associated with Temple worship (2:15). But he probably was not a priest, since he called upon the priests to go into mourning because of the sins of the nation (1:13). Indeed, Joel's many references to agriculture (1:7,10-12) may indicate he was a farmer or a herdsman, although this is not certain.

It is difficult to determine the exact date of this book's writing. Unlike most of the other Old Testament prophets, Joel mentions no kings of Judah or Israel and no historical events that might give us some indication about when he wrote his prophecy. The one strong clue is the similarity of Joel's concept of the Day of the Lord to the language of the prophet Zephaniah (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:14-16). Zephaniah prophesied shortly before the fall of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah in 587 B.C. This also seems the most likely time for the writing of the Book of Joel.

Historical Setting.

If Joel did write his book about 600 B.C., he would have lived in the frantic final years of the nation of Judah. After the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. the leading citizens of Judah were carried into captivity in Babylon. This invasion of the Babylonians must have given special significance to the terrible "day of the Lord" about which Joel warned his countrymen.

Theological Contribution.

The Book of Joel is remarkable because it shows that a message from God can often come packaged in the form of a natural disaster. The truth of the book is rooted in the disastrous invasion of locusts, which Joel describes in such vivid language. This prophet teaches us that the Lord may use a natural disaster to stir in His people a renewed awareness of His will. Any traumatic event of nature-flood, fire, storm, or earthquake-should motivate the sensitive ear to listen again to the words of the Lord.

Special Considerations.

Readers of Joel are always impressed with the prediction of the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28-32). The apostle Peter used this passage to explain the exciting events of PENTECOST to his hearers (Acts 2:16-21). Just as Joel predicted, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all these early followers of Jesus who were gathered in Jerusalem seeking God's will and praying for His divine guidance.

But there is still a future dimension to Joel's prediction. The gifts of the Spirit that began to flow through the people of God on Pentecost were not exhausted on that day. They are still available to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who anxiously await His return and the final establishment of His kingdom.

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OBADIAH [oh bah DIE ah] (servant of Jehovah)

A prophet of Judah (Obad). The fourth of the "minor" prophets, Obadiah's message was directed against Edom. Some scholars believe Obadiah was a contemporary of Jehoram, during whose reign (about 844 B.C.) Jerusalem was invaded by Philistines and Arabians (2 Chron 21:16-17). Other scholars suggest a date following 587/86, the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Still others suggest an earlier Babylonian assault on Jerusalem, in 605 B.C.

Whatever date is assigned to Obadiah, he lived during a time of trouble for Jerusalem. His prophecy against Edom condemned the Edomites for taking sides against Jerusalem in its distress (Obad 15). The strongest mountain fortresses would be no defense for the Edomites against the DAY OF THE LORD-the time when God would bring His final judgment upon the world.

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OBADIAH, BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament that pronounces God's judgment against the EDMITES, ancient enemies of the nation of Israel. The book is the shortest in the Old Testament, containing one chapter of only 21 verses.

Structure of the Book.

In a brief introduction, the author reveals himself as the prophet OBADIAH, a name meaning "servant of the Lord" or "worshiper of Jehovah." He makes it clear that he has received this message directly from God. The Lord has announced that He will destroy the Edomites because they have sinned against Israel. They mocked God's Covenant People in their hour of misfortune and even participated in the destruction and looting of the capital city, Jerusalem, when it fell to a foreign power. Because of this great sin, Edom will be destroyed. But Israel, the prophet declares, will be blessed by God and restored to its native land.

Authorship and Date.

The author clearly identifies himself as the prophet Obadiah, but this is all we know about him. Several Obadias are mentioned in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:3; Ezra 8:9; Neh 12:25), but none of these can be identified for sure as the author of this book. But at least his prophecy can be dated with greater certainty. Most scholars believe the great humiliation of Israel, which the prophet mentions was the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, beginning in 605 B.C. and ending with its final destruction in 586 B.C. Thus, the book must have been written shortly after the fall of the city, perhaps while the Israelites were still in Captivity in Babylon.

Historical Setting.

This book's condemnation of the Edomites is understandable when we consider the bitter feelings that had always existed between these two nations. It began centuries earlier when the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, went their separate ways (Gen 27; 36). Esau's descendants settled south of the Dead Sea and became known as the Edomites. Jacob's descendants settled farther north, eventually developing into the Covenant People known as the nation of Israel. The Bible reports many clashes between these two factions.

One notable example was the refusal of the Edomites to let the Israelites cross their land as they traveled toward the land of Canaan (Num 20:14-21). But the final insult to Israel must have been Edom's participation in the looting of Jerusalem after the city fell to the Babylonians. This led the prophet Obadiah to declare, "For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever" (v. 10).

Theological Contribution.

The Book of Obadiah makes it clear that God takes His promises to His Covenant People seriously. He declared in the Book of Genesis that He would bless the rest of the world through Abraham and his descendants. He also promised to protect His special people against any who would try to do them harm (Gen 12:1-3). This promise is affirmed in the Book of Obadiah. God is determined to keep faith with His people, in spite of their unworthiness and disobedience.

Special Considerations.

Verses 1:1-9 of Obadiah and Jer 49:7-22 express essentially the same idea. Many of the words and phrases in these two passages are exactly alike. Some scholars believe Jeremiah drew from the Obadiah passage to emphasize God's impending judgment on Edom. If this is true, it indicates the little Book of Obadiah was taken seriously by Jeremiah, one of the great prophetic figures in Israel's history.

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HOSEA

[hoe ZAY uh] (deliverance)-an Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Hosea. The son of Beeri (Hosea 1:1), Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel during the chaotic period just before the fall of this nation in 722 B.C. The literary features within Hosea's book suggest he was a member of the upper class. The tone and contents of the book also show he was a man of deep compassion, strong loyalty, and keen awareness of the political events taking place in the world at that time. As a prophet, he was also deeply committed to God and His will as it was being revealed to His Covenant People.

Hosea is one of the most unusual prophets of the Old Testament, since he was commanded by God to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2-9). His wife Gomer eventually returned to her life of sin, but Hosea bought her back from the slave market and restored her as his wife (Hosea 3). His unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sin or "harlotry" of the nation of Israel in rejecting the one true God and serving pagan gods. Although the people deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea emphasized that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people.

In his unquestioning obedience of God, Hosea demonstrated he was a prophet who would follow his Lord's will, no matter what the cost. He was a sensitive, compassionate spokesman for righteousness whose own life echoed the message that God is love.

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HOSEA, BOOK OF

A prophetic book of the Old Testament that emphasizes God's steadfast love for His COVENANT PEOPLE, in spite of their continuing sin and rebellion. The book is named for its author, the prophet Hosea, who demonstrated God's steadfast love in dramatic fashion through his devotion to his own unfaithful wife.

Structure of the Book.

Hosea contains 14 chapters that are filled with some of the most powerful truths in all the Bible. After a brief introduction of himself as God's prophet, Hosea tells about his unusual family situation. God appeared to Hosea, instructing him, "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry" (1:2). The reason for this unusual request was to demonstrate that God's Covenant People, the nation of Israel, had been unfaithful to God because of their worship of false gods.

Hosea did as the Lord commanded, taking a prostitute named Gomer as his wife. The first three chapters of the book report their stormy relationship as husband and wife. Soon after their marriage, Gomer bore three children. Hosea gave them symbolic names-Jezreel (God scatters), Lo-Ruhamah (Not Pitied), and Lo-Ammi (Not My People)-to show that God was about to bring His judgment upon the nation of Israel because the people had fallen into worship of false gods. Just as the nation rejected God, Gomer eventually left Hosea and the children to return to her life of prostitution. But Hosea's love for his wife refused to die.

He searched until he found her at the slave market. Then he bought her back and restored her as his wife. This tender picture showed clearly that God had not given up on Israel, although the people had "played the harlot" many times by returning to their old life of pagan worship and enslavement to sin.

The second major division of Hosea's book, chapters 4-Hos, contains the prophet's messages of judgment against the nations of Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea's homeland, is singled out for strong rebuke because of its gross sin and immorality. But the book ends on a positive note. In tender language, the prophet reminds the nation of God's undying love. In spite of their unfaithfulness, He is determined to redeem them and restore them to their favored place as His Covenant People.

Authorship and Date.

The undisputed author of this book is the prophet Hosea, who identifies himself in the book as "the son of Beeri" (1:1). His name, a variant form of Joshua and Jesus, means "salvation." The prophet also says that he lived and prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel while four successive kings-Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah-were ruling in Judah. This means his prophetic ministry covered a period of about 40 years, from about 755 B.C. to about 715 B.C. His book was written some time during these years.

Historical Setting.

Hosea prophesied during the twilight years of the northern kingdom of Israel, a time of rapid moral decline. Worship of false gods was mixed with worship of the one true God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests lost sight of the real meaning of worship. Although King JEROBOAM II was the instigator of many of these policies, at least his 40-year reign (793-753 B.C.) brought a measure of political stability to the nation. This stability came to an end when he died. In rapid succession, six different kings ruled Israel during the next 25 years; four were eliminated by assassination. Weakened by internal strife, Israel collapsed in 722 B.C. when the nation of Assyria destroyed Samaria, Israel's capital city. Hosea was probably an eyewitness to many of these events as his prophecy about God's judgment on Israel was fulfilled.

Theological Contribution.

Through his marriage and prophetic message, Hosea presents a vivid picture of the steadfast love of God for His people. Because they have sinned and broken the covenant God's people deserve His certain judgment. But because of His undying love for them, His mercy and loving kindness will prevail. Many people believe the Old Testament portrays God's wrath, while the New Testament pictures His love. But the Book of Hosea includes tender expressions of deep love among this prophet's descriptions of judgment. Hosea ranks with Deuteronomy and the Gospel of John as major biblical treatises on the love of God. This love is not mere sentiment; it is rooted in compassion and bound in holiness. God's love makes demands, but it is also willing to forgive.

Special Considerations.

The Book of Hosea is noted for its many references to the history of Israel, as well as its vivid poetic images. Throughout the book the prophet speaks tenderly of the nation of Israel as "EPHRAIM." This is a reference to the largest of the ten northern tribes of Palestine that made up the nation of Israel. Because of their superior numbers, Ephraim was a symbol of power and strength. This tribal name also reminded the nation of its history and tradition. Ephraim, after whom the tribe was named (Gen 48:17-22), was the son of Joseph.

Few events in the Bible have been debated as strongly as Hosea's marriage. The command for a man of God to marry a harlot is so startling that interpreters have offered many different explanations. Some suggest that the story is meant to be read only as an allegory. Others believe Gomer was faithful at first but went astray after their marriage. Still others believe she was a prostitute from the very beginning but that Hosea did not learn this until later.

All of these approaches to the passage issue from our offended sense of right and wrong. The plain meaning of the text is that Hosea married a prostitute at God's direct command. In this way, through his own tormented life Hosea could present a striking picture of the pain in God's heart because of the harlotries of His Covenant People.

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MICAH [MIE kuh] (Who is like Jehovah?)-

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Micah. A younger contemporary of the great prophet Isaiah, Micah was from Moresheth Gath (Mic 1:1,14), a town in southern Judah. His prophecy reveals his country origins; he uses many images from country life (Mic 7:1).

Micah spoke out strongly against those who claimed to be prophets of the Lord but who used this position to lead the people of Judah into false hopes and further errors: "The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them" (Mic 3:6). Micah's love for God would not allow him to offer false hopes to those who were under His sentence of judgment.

Little else is known about this courageous spokesman for the Lord. He tells us in his book that he prophesied during the reigns of three kings in Judah: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Mic 1:1). This would place the time of his ministry from about 750 to 687 B.C.

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MICAH, BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament, known for its condemnation of the rich because of their exploitation of the poor. Micah also contains a clear prediction of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, centuries before Jesus was actually born in this humble little village. The book takes its title from its author, the prophet Micah, whose name means, "Who is like Jehovah?"

Structure of the Book.

Micah is a short book of only seven chapters, but it stands as a classic example of the work to which the Old Testament prophets were called. Over and over again, Micah sounds the theme of God's judgment against his homeland, Judah, as well as her sister nation, Israel, because of their moral decline. Micah watched as the Assyrians grew in strength and marched their armies throughout the ancient world. It was clear to him that this pagan nation would serve as the instrument of God's judgment unless Judah and Israel turned back to God.

Micah also is known as the champion of the oppressed. He condemns wealthy landowners for taking the land of the poor (2:2). He also attacks dishonest merchants for using false weights, bribing judges, and charging excessive interest rates. Even the priests and prophets seemed to be caught up in this tidal wave of greed and dishonesty that swept his country. To a people more concerned about observing rituals than living a life of righteousness, Micah thundered, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). This is one of the greatest passages in the Old Testament. It expresses the timeless truth that authentic worship consists of following God's will and dealing justly with other people.

In addition to the theme of judgment, Micah also emphasizes the reality of God's love. Practically every passage about God's wrath is balanced with a promise of God's blessing. The greatest promise in the book is a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah: "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel" (5:2). This messianic verse is stunning in its accuracy because it names the specific town where the Messiah was born-the village of Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Judah. This prophecy was fulfilled about 700 years after Micah's time with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The final two chapters of Micah's book are presented in the form of a debate between God and His people. God invites the nations of Israel and Judah to reason with Him on the subject of their conduct. He convinces them that their sin is deep and grievous, but He assures them of His presence in spite of their unworthiness.

Authorship and Date.

This book was written by the prophet Micah, a native of the village of Moresheth (1:1) in southern Judah near the Philistine city of Gath. Since Micah championed the rights of the poor, he was probably a humble farmer

or herdsman himself, although he shows a remarkable knowledge of Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of the nations of Judah and Israel. Micah also tells us that he prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). The reigns of these three kings stretched from about 750 B. C. to 687 B. C.; so his book was probably written sometime during this period.

Historical Setting.

The Book of Micah belongs to that turbulent period during which the Assyrians launched their drive for supremacy throughout the ancient world. Micah probably saw his prophecy of judgment against Israel fulfilled, since the Assyrians defeated this nation in 722 B.C. The fall of Israel to the north must have stunned the citizens of Judah. Would they be the next to fall before the conquering armies of this pagan nation? Still, the religious leaders retreated into a false confidence that no evil would befall them because the Temple was situated in their capital city of Jerusalem (3:11). Micah warned there was no magical saving power in their Temple or their rituals (3:12). They needed to turn back to God as their source of strength and power.

Theological Contribution.

The mixture of judgment and promise in the Book of Micah is a striking characteristic of the Old Testament prophets. These contrasting passages give real insight into the character of God. In His wrath He remembers mercy; He cannot maintain His anger forever. Judgment with love is the ironic, but essential, work of the Lord. In the darkest days of impending judgment on Israel and Judah, there always was the possibility that a remnant would be spared. God was determined to maintain His holiness, and so He acted in judgment on those who had broken His covenant. But He was just as determined to fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham centuries earlier. This compelled Him to point to the fulfillment of the covenant in the kingdom to come.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Book of Micah is its clear prediction of a coming Savior. The future Messiah is referred to indirectly in some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. But He is mentioned directly in the Book of Micah.

This prophecy of the Messiah's birth is remarkable when we think of the circumstances that were necessary to bring it to fulfillment. Although they were residents of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph happened to be in Bethlehem at the right time when the Messiah was born about 700 years after Micah's prediction. This is a valuable lesson on the providence of God. He always manages to work His will through a unique combination of forces and events.

Special Considerations.

Micah begins his words of judgment with calls for the people to come to court. God is portrayed as the prosecuting attorney, the witness for the prosecution, and the sentencing judge. God is a witness against His people (1:2); He demands justice (3:1); He even calls upon the elements of creation to be His witnesses, since He has a legal dispute against His people (6:1-2). This type of language is also found in the Book of Isaiah (Isa 1:2). It is likely that Isaiah and Micah drew this terminology from the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut 31:28). The clear implication is that God has the right to hold His people accountable for their behavior.

God insists that His people keep their part of the covenant agreement. But even while making His demands, He holds out the possibility of grace and forgiveness. This leads his Covenant People to declare: "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old" (7:19-20).

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MALACHI [MAL ah kie] (my messenger)

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Some scholars believe the word Malachi should be interpreted as a description ("my messenger") rather than as the name of a specific person. This line of reasoning concludes that the book was written by an unknown author. But no other book of prophecy in the Old Testament was written anonymously. Although nothing else is known about this person, the weight of tradition has assumed the book was written by a prophet named Malachi. The prophecy can be specifically dated at about 450 B.C.

Historical Setting.

Malachi was addressed to the nation of Israel about 100 years after its return from captivity in Babylon. At first the people had been enthusiastic about rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple and restoring their system of worship. But their zeal soon began to wane. They wondered about God's love for them as His Chosen People. They began to offer defective animals as sacrifices and to withhold their tithes and offerings. Malachi was written to call the people back to authentic worship of their Redeemer God.

Theological Contributions.

The prophecy of Malachi is noted for its vivid portrayal of the love of God as well as His might and power. Israel needed to be reminded of these truths at a time when widespread doubt had dashed its expectations of the Messiah.

Special Considerations.

Malachi leaves us with the feeling that the story is not yet finished, that God still has promises to fulfill on behalf of His people. After Malachi came 400 long years of silence. But when the time was right, heaven would burst forth in song at the arrival of the Messiah.

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NAHUM [NAY hum] (compassionate)

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Nahum whose prophesy pronounced God's judgment against the mighty nation of Assyria.

Very little is known about Nahum. His hometown, Elkosh in the nation of Israel (Nah 1:1), has not been located. But he must have lived some time shortly before 612 B.C., the year when Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, was destroyed by the Babylonians. Nahum announced that the judgment of God would soon be visited upon this pagan city.

The Book of Nahum is similar to the Book of Obadiah, since both these prophecies were addressed against neighboring nations. Obadiah spoke the word of the Lord against Edom, while Nahum prophesied against Assyria. Both messages contained a word of hope for God's Covenant People, since they announced that Israel's enemies would soon be overthrown.

While little is known about Nahum the man, his prophetic writing is one of the most colorful in the Old Testament. The Book of Nahum is marked by strong imagery, a sense of suspense, and vivid language, with biting puns and deadly satire. Nahum was a man who understood God's goodness, but he could also describe the terror of the Lord against His enemies.

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NAHUM, BOOK OF

A short prophetic book of the Old Testament that foretells the destruction of the nation of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh.

Structure of the Book.

The book opens with a brief identification of the prophet Nahum. Then it launches into a psalm of praise that celebrates the power and goodness of God. This comforting picture is contrasted with the evil deeds of the Assyrians. With graphic language, Nahum presents a prophetic picture of the coming judgment of God. He informs the nation of Assyria that its days as a world power are drawing to a close. In an oracle of woe, the prophet describes Nineveh as a "bloody city, full of lies and robbery" (3:1). But soon the city of Nineveh will be laid waste, and Assyria will crumble before the judgment of God.

Authorship and Date. This book was written by a prophet known as "Nahum the Elkoshite" (1:1). This brief identification tells us all we know about this spokesman for the Lord. Even the location of his home, Elkosh, is uncertain, although some scholars believe he may have lived in northern Judah. The book can be dated with reasonable accuracy. Nineveh fell, as Nahum predicted, about 612 B.C. therefore, the book was probably written shortly before this time.

Historical Setting.

For more than 100 years before Nahum's day, Assyria had been one of the dominant powers of the ancient world. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyrian forces in 722 B.C. Some prophets taught that this pagan nation was used as an instrument of God's judgment against His wayward people. But now it was Assyria's turn to feel the force of God's wrath. The armies of Nabopolassar of Babylon stormed Nineveh in 612 B.C. The entire Assyrian Empire crumbled three years later under the relentless assault of this aggressive Babylonian ruler. Thus, as Nahum prophesied, Assyria's day of dominance ended with their humiliation by a foreign power.

Theological Contribution.

This book teaches the sure judgment of God against those who oppose His will and abuse His people. Acts of inhumanity are acts against God, and He will serve as the ultimate and final judge. God sometimes uses a pagan nation as an instrument of His judgment, just as He used the Assyrians against the nation of Israel. But this does not excuse the pagan nation from God's laws and requirements. It will be judged by the same standards of righteousness and holiness, which God applies to all the other people of the world.

Special Considerations.

By a strange irony, the city in Galilee most closely associated with the ministry of Jesus was Capernaum. The name Capernaum in the Hebrew language means "the village of Nahum."

Some people wonder about the gloomy, pessimistic tone of the Book of Nahum. How can this picture of

God's wrath and judgment be reconciled with the God of grace and love whom we meet in the New Testament? As the sovereign, all-powerful God, He has the right to work His purpose in the world. Judgment against sin is a part of the work, which He must do in order to remain a just and holy God.

Nahum's announcement of God's approaching judgment also carries a call for holy living and faithful proclamation by God's Covenant People. Our work is to carry the message of His salvation to those who are surely doomed unless they turn to God in repentance and faith.

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JOEL [JOE uhl] (Jehovah is God)

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Joel. A citizen of Jerusalem, he spoke often of the priests and their duties (Joel 1:9,13-14,16). For this reason, many scholars believe he may have been a Temple prophet. He also had an ear for nature (Joel 1:4-7), and included imagery from agriculture and the natural world in his messages.

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JOEL BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament that predicted the outpouring of the spirit of God on all people—a prophecy fulfilled several centuries later on the Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21). The title of the book comes from its author, the prophet Joel, whose name means Jehovah is God.

For an outline of the book see Joel

Structure of the Book.

The three brief chapters of this book are divided into two major sections of about equal length. In the first section (1:1-2:11) the prophet Joel introduces himself and speaks to his readers about their need to turn from their sins. The speaker in the second part of the book (2:12-3:21) is the all-powerful God, who warns His people about the approaching Day of Judgment and assures them of His abiding presence, in spite of their unworthiness.

In the first section of the book, Joel calls attention to a devastating swarm of locusts that had recently swept through the land (1:4). These destructive locusts stripped the foliage from all trees, shrubs, and crops (1:7). The people and livestock of Judah were facing the threat of starvation because of the famine that followed this invasion (1:15-18). As bad as this natural catastrophe had been, the prophet declares it will be as nothing in comparison to the coming day of the Lord. This is the day of JUDGMENT, when God will vent His wrath upon His sinful and disobedient people. Joel also informs the people that this terrible day can be avoided. The way of escape is to turn to God "with all your heart, with fasting, and with mourning" (2:12). After Joel delivers his pleas for repentance, God Himself speaks to His wayward people. In spite of the famine, He declares that there will be plenty to eat in the days of blessing to come (2:18-19). This day of renewal will be marked by the outpouring of His spirit on all people (2:28-29). All the nations of the world will take notice as God gathers His people together in the holy city of Jerusalem to serve as their ruler: "Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation" (3:20).

Authorship and Date.

The author of this book was the prophet Joel, who identifies himself in the introduction as "the son of Pethuel" (1:1). This is all we know about this spokesman for the Lord. From evidence in the book itself, we can assume that he knew a great deal about Jerusalem, Judah's capital city, and the rituals associated with Temple worship (2:15). But he probably was not a priest, since he called upon the priests to go into mourning because of the sins of the nation (1:13). Indeed, Joel's many references to agriculture (1:7,10-12) may indicate he was a farmer or a herdsman, although this is not certain.

It is difficult to determine the exact date of this book's writing. Unlike most of the other Old Testament prophets, Joel mentions no kings of Judah or Israel and no historical events that might give us some indication about when he wrote his prophecy. The one strong clue is the similarity of Joel's concept of the Day of the Lord to the language of the prophet Zephaniah (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:14-16). Zephaniah prophesied shortly before the fall of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah in 587 B.C. This also seems the most likely time for the writing of the Book of Joel.

Historical Setting.

If Joel did write his book about 600 B.C., he would have lived in the frantic final years of the nation of Judah. After the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. the leading citizens of Judah were carried into captivity in Babylon. This invasion of the Babylonians must have given special significance to the terrible "day of the Lord" about which Joel warned his countrymen.

Theological Contribution.

The Book of Joel is remarkable because it shows that a message from God can often come packaged in the form of a natural disaster. The truth of the book is rooted in the disastrous invasion of locusts, which Joel describes in such vivid language. This prophet teaches us that the Lord may use a natural disaster to stir in His people a renewed awareness of His will. Any traumatic event of nature-flood, fire, storm, or earthquake-should motivate the sensitive ear to listen again to the words of the Lord.

Special Considerations.

Readers of Joel are always impressed with the prediction of the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28-32). The apostle Peter used this passage to explain the exciting events of PENTECOST to his hearers (Acts 2:16-21). Just as Joel predicted, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all these early followers of Jesus who were gathered in Jerusalem seeking God's will and praying for His divine guidance.

But there is still a future dimension to Joel's prediction. The gifts of the Spirit that began to flow through the people of God on Pentecost were not exhausted on that day. They are still available to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who anxiously await His return and the final establishment of His kingdom.

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OBADIAH [oh bah DIE ah] (servant of Jehovah)

A prophet of Judah (Obad). The fourth of the "minor" prophets, Obadiah's message was directed against Edom. Some scholars believe Obadiah was a contemporary of Jehoram, during whose reign (about 844 B.C.) Jerusalem was invaded by Philistines and Arabians (2 Chron 21:16-17). Other scholars suggest a date following 587/86, the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Still others suggest an earlier Babylonian assault on Jerusalem, in 605 B.C.

Whatever date is assigned to Obadiah, he lived during a time of trouble for Jerusalem. His prophecy against Edom condemned the Edomites for taking sides against Jerusalem in its distress (Obad 15). The strongest mountain fortresses would be no defense for the Edomites against the DAY OF THE LORD-the time when God would bring His final judgment upon the world.

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OBADIAH, BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament that pronounces God's judgment against the EDMITES, ancient enemies of the nation of Israel. The book is the shortest in the Old Testament, containing one chapter of only 21 verses.

Structure of the Book.

In a brief introduction, the author reveals himself as the prophet OBADIAH, a name meaning "servant of the Lord" or "worshiper of Jehovah." He makes it clear that he has received this message directly from God. The Lord has announced that He will destroy the Edomites because they have sinned against Israel. They mocked God's Covenant People in their hour of misfortune and even participated in the destruction and looting of the capital city, Jerusalem, when it fell to a foreign power. Because of this great sin, Edom will be destroyed. But Israel, the prophet declares, will be blessed by God and restored to its native land.

Authorship and Date.

The author clearly identifies himself as the prophet Obadiah, but this is all we know about him. Several Obadiah's are mentioned in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:3; Ezra 8:9; Neh 12:25), but none of these can be identified for sure as the author of this book. But at least his prophecy can be dated with greater certainty. Most scholars believe the great humiliation of Israel, which the prophet mentions was the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, beginning in 605 B.C. and ending with its final destruction in 586 B.C. Thus, the book must have been written shortly after the fall of the city, perhaps while the Israelites were still in Captivity in Babylon.

Historical Setting.

This book's condemnation of the Edomites is understandable when we consider the bitter feelings that had always existed between these two nations. It began centuries earlier when the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, went their separate ways (Gen 27; 36). Esau's descendants settled south of the Dead Sea and became known as the Edomites. Jacob's descendants settled farther north, eventually developing into the Covenant People known as the nation of Israel. The Bible reports many clashes between these two factions.

One notable example was the refusal of the Edomites to let the Israelites cross their land as they traveled toward the land of Canaan (Num 20:14-21). But the final insult to Israel must have been Edom's participation in the looting of Jerusalem after the city fell to the Babylonians. This led the prophet Obadiah to declare, "For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever" (v. 10).

Theological Contribution.

The Book of Obadiah makes it clear that God takes His promises to His Covenant People seriously. He declared in the Book of Genesis that He would bless the rest of the world through Abraham and his descendants. He also promised to protect His special people against any who would try to do them harm (Gen 12:1-3). This promise is affirmed in the Book of Obadiah. God is determined to keep faith with His people, in spite of their unworthiness and disobedience.

Special Considerations.

Verses 1:1-9 of Obadiah and Jer 49:7-22 express essentially the same idea. Many of the words and phrases in these two passages are exactly alike. Some scholars believe Jeremiah drew from the Obadiah passage to emphasize God's impending judgment on Edom. If this is true, it indicates the little Book of Obadiah was taken seriously by Jeremiah, one of the great prophetic figures in Israel's history.

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HOSEA

[hoe ZAY uh] (deliverance)-an Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Hosea. The son of Beeri (Hosea 1:1), Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel during the chaotic period just before the fall of this nation in 722 B.C. The literary features within Hosea's book suggest he was a member of the upper class. The tone and contents of the book also show he was a man of deep compassion, strong loyalty, and keen awareness of the political events taking place in the world at that time. As a prophet, he was also deeply committed to God and His will as it was being revealed to His Covenant People.

Hosea is one of the most unusual prophets of the Old Testament, since he was commanded by God to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2-9). His wife Gomer eventually returned to her life of sin, but Hosea bought her back from the slave market and restored her as his wife (Hosea 3). His unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sin or "harlotry" of the nation of Israel in rejecting the one true God and serving pagan gods. Although the people deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea emphasized that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people.

In his unquestioning obedience of God, Hosea demonstrated he was a prophet who would follow his Lord's will, no matter what the cost. He was a sensitive, compassionate spokesman for righteousness whose own life echoed the message that God is love.

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HOSEA, BOOK OF

A prophetic book of the Old Testament that emphasizes God's steadfast love for His COVENANT PEOPLE, in spite of their continuing sin and rebellion. The book is named for its author, the prophet Hosea, who demonstrated God's steadfast love in dramatic fashion through his devotion to his own unfaithful wife.

Structure of the Book.

Hosea contains 14 chapters that are filled with some of the most powerful truths in all the Bible. After a brief introduction of himself as God's prophet, Hosea tells about his unusual family situation. God appeared to Hosea, instructing him, "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry" (1:2). The reason for this unusual request was to demonstrate that God's Covenant People, the nation of Israel, had been unfaithful to God because of their worship of false gods.

Hosea did as the Lord commanded, taking a prostitute named Gomer as his wife. The first three chapters of the book report their stormy relationship as husband and wife. Soon after their marriage, Gomer bore three children. Hosea gave them symbolic names-Jezeziel (God scatters), Lo-Ruhamah (Not Pitied), and Lo-Ammi (Not My People)-to show that God was about to bring His judgment upon the nation of Israel because the people had fallen into worship of false gods. Just as the nation rejected God, Gomer eventually left Hosea and the children to return to her life of prostitution. But Hosea's love for his wife refused to die.

He searched until he found her at the slave market. Then he bought her back and restored her as his wife. This tender picture showed clearly that God had not given up on Israel, although the people had "played the harlot" many times by returning to their old life of pagan worship and enslavement to sin.

The second major division of Hosea's book, chapters 4-Hos, contains the prophet's messages of judgment against the nations of Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea's homeland, is singled out for strong rebuke because of its gross sin and immorality. But the book ends on a positive note. In tender language, the prophet reminds the nation of God's undying love. In spite of their unfaithfulness, He is determined to redeem them and restore them to their favored place as His Covenant People.

Authorship and Date.

The undisputed author of this book is the prophet Hosea, who identifies himself in the book as "the son of Beeri" (1:1). His name, a variant form of Joshua and Jesus, means "salvation." The prophet also says that he lived and prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel while four successive kings-Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah-were ruling in Judah. This means his prophetic ministry covered a period of about 40 years, from about 755 B.C. to about 715 B.C. His book was written some time during these years.

Historical Setting.

Hosea prophesied during the twilight years of the northern kingdom of Israel, a time of rapid moral decline. Worship of false gods was mixed with worship of the one true God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests lost sight of the real meaning of worship. Although King ZEROBBOAD II was the instigator of many of these policies, at least his 40-year reign (793-753 B.C.) brought a measure of political stability to the nation. This stability came to an end when he died. In rapid succession, six different kings ruled Israel during the next 25 years; four were eliminated by assassination. Weakened by internal strife, Israel collapsed in 722 B.C. when the nation of Assyria destroyed Samaria, Israel's capital city. Hosea was probably an eyewitness to many of these events as his prophecy about God's judgment on Israel was fulfilled.

Theological Contribution.

Through his marriage and prophetic message, Hosea presents a vivid picture of the steadfast love of God for His people. Because they have sinned and broken the covenant God's people deserve His certain judgment. But because of His undying love for them, His mercy and loving kindness will prevail. Many people believe the Old Testament portrays God's wrath, while the New Testament pictures His love. But the Book of Hosea includes tender expressions of deep love among this prophet's descriptions of judgment. Hosea ranks with Deuteronomy and the Gospel of John as major biblical treatises on the love of God. This love is not mere sentiment; it is rooted in compassion and bound in holiness. God's love makes demands, but it is also willing to forgive.

Special Considerations.

The Book of Hosea is noted for its many references to the history of Israel, as well as its vivid poetic images. Throughout the book the prophet speaks tenderly of the nation of Israel as "EPHRAIM." This is a reference to the largest of the ten northern tribes of Palestine that made up the nation of Israel. Because of their superior numbers, Ephraim was a symbol of power and strength. This tribal name also reminded the nation of its history and tradition. Ephraim, after whom the tribe was named (Gen 48:17-22), was the son of Joseph.

Few events in the Bible have been debated as strongly as Hosea's marriage. The command for a man of God to marry a harlot is so startling that interpreters have offered many different explanations. Some suggest that the story is meant to be read only as an allegory. Others believe Gomer was faithful at first but went astray after their marriage. Still others believe she was a prostitute from the very beginning but that Hosea did not learn this until later.

All of these approaches to the passage issue from our offended sense of right and wrong. The plain meaning of the text is that Hosea married a prostitute at God's direct command. In this way, through his own tormented life Hosea could present a striking picture of the pain in God's heart because of the harlotries of His Covenant People.

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MICAH [MIE kuh] (Who is like Jehovah?)-

An Old Testament prophet and author of the Book of Micah. A younger contemporary of the great prophet Isaiah, Micah was from Moresheth Gath (Mic 1:1,14), a town in southern Judah. His prophecy reveals his country origins; he uses many images from country life (Mic 7:1).

Micah spoke out strongly against those who claimed to be prophets of the Lord but who used this position to lead the people of Judah into false hopes and further errors: "The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them" (Mic 3:6). Micah's love for God would not allow him to offer false hopes to those who were under His sentence of judgment.

Little else is known about this courageous spokesman for the Lord. He tells us in his book that he prophesied during the reigns of three kings in Judah: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Mic 1:1). This would place the time of his ministry from about 750 to 687 B.C.

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MICAH, BOOK OF

A brief prophetic book of the Old Testament, known for its condemnation of the rich because of their exploitation of the poor. Micah also contains a clear prediction of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, centuries before Jesus was actually born in this humble little village. The book takes its title from its author, the prophet Micah, whose name means, "Who is like Jehovah?"

Structure of the Book.

Micah is a short book of only seven chapters, but it stands as a classic example of the work to which the Old Testament prophets were called. Over and over again, Micah sounds the theme of God's judgment against his homeland, Judah, as well as her sister nation, Israel, because of their moral decline. Micah watched as the Assyrians grew in strength and marched their armies throughout the ancient world. It was clear to him that this pagan nation would serve as the instrument of God's judgment unless Judah and Israel turned back to God.

Micah also is known as the champion of the oppressed. He condemns wealthy landowners for taking the land of the poor (2:2). He also attacks dishonest merchants for using false weights, bribing judges, and charging excessive interest rates. Even the priests and prophets seemed to be caught up in this tidal wave of greed and dishonesty that swept his country. To a people more concerned about observing rituals than living a life of righteousness, Micah thundered, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). This is one of the greatest passages in the Old Testament. It expresses the timeless truth that authentic worship consists of following God's will and dealing justly with other people.

In addition to the theme of judgment, Micah also emphasizes the reality of God's love. Practically every passage about God's wrath is balanced with a promise of God's blessing. The greatest promise in the book is a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah: "But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel" (5:2). This messianic verse is stunning in its accuracy because it names the specific town where the Messiah was born-the village of Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Judah. This prophecy was fulfilled about 700 years after Micah's time with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The final two chapters of Micah's book are presented in the form of a debate between God and His people. God invites the nations of Israel and Judah to reason with Him on the subject of their conduct. He convinces them that their sin is deep and grievous, but He assures them of His presence in spite of their unworthiness.

Authorship and Date.

This book was written by the prophet Micah, a native of the village of Moresheth (1:1) in southern Judah near the Philistine city of Gath. Since Micah championed the rights of the poor, he was probably a humble farmer

or herdsman himself, although he shows a remarkable knowledge of Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of the nations of Judah and Israel. Micah also tells us that he prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). The reigns of these three kings stretched from about 750 B. C. to 687 B. C.; so his book was probably written sometime during this period.

Historical Setting.

The Book of Micah belongs to that turbulent period during which the Assyrians launched their drive for supremacy throughout the ancient world. Micah probably saw his prophecy of judgment against Israel fulfilled, since the Assyrians defeated this nation in 722 B.C. The fall of Israel to the north must have stunned the citizens of Judah. Would they be the next to fall before the conquering armies of this pagan nation? Still, the religious leaders retreated into a false confidence that no evil would befall them because the Temple was situated in their capital city of Jerusalem (3:11). Micah warned there was no magical saving power in their Temple or their rituals (3:12). They needed to turn back to God as their source of strength and power.

Theological Contribution.

The mixture of judgment and promise in the Book of Micah is a striking characteristic of the Old Testament prophets. These contrasting passages give real insight into the character of God. In His wrath He remembers mercy; He cannot maintain His anger forever. Judgment with love is the ironic, but essential, work of the Lord. In the darkest days of impending judgment on Israel and Judah, there always was the possibility that a remnant would be spared. God was determined to maintain His holiness, and so He acted in judgment on those who had broken His covenant. But He was just as determined to fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham centuries earlier. This compelled Him to point to the fulfillment of the covenant in the kingdom to come.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Book of Micah is its clear prediction of a coming Savior. The future Messiah is referred to indirectly in some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. But He is mentioned directly in the Book of Micah.

This prophecy of the Messiah's birth is remarkable when we think of the circumstances that were necessary to bring it to fulfillment. Although they were residents of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph happened to be in Bethlehem at the right time when the Messiah was born about 700 years after Micah's prediction. This is a valuable lesson on the providence of God. He always manages to work His will through a unique combination of forces and events.

Special Considerations.

Micah begins his words of judgment with calls for the people to come to court. God is portrayed as the prosecuting attorney, the witness for the prosecution, and the sentencing judge. God is a witness against His people (1:2); He demands justice (3:1); He even calls upon the elements of creation to be His witnesses, since He has a legal dispute against His people (6:1-2). This type of language is also found in the Book of Isaiah (Isa 1:2). It is likely that Isaiah and Micah drew this terminology from the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut 31:28). The clear implication is that God has the right to hold His people accountable for their behavior.

God insists that His people keep their part of the covenant agreement. But even while making His demands, He holds out the possibility of grace and forgiveness. This leads his Covenant People to declare: "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old" (7:19-20).

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