

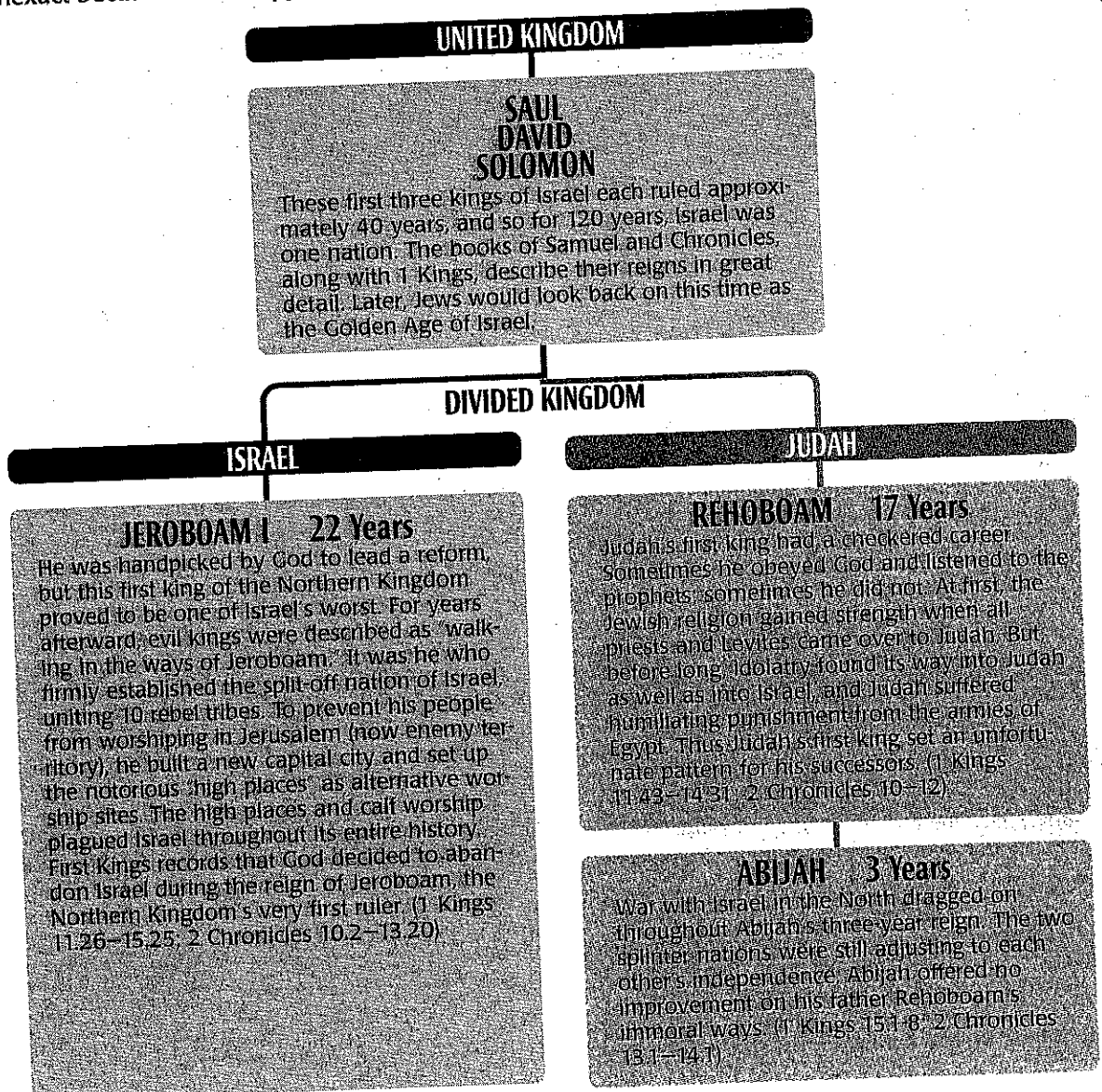
# A Lineup of Rulers

The two-part book of Kings can be confusing. First, there's one nation to keep track of, then two, then one again. In all, 39 rulers are profiled. Little wonder it takes a Biblical scholar to keep all the details straight.

The following list of 38 kings and one queen should help clarify the history of Israel in the North and Judah in the South. As you come across the name of a ruler in one of the history books or in a book of the prophets, simply refer to the capsule description below for a brief summary of life during the time of that ruler or prophet.

In all, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were united for 120 years and divided for just over 200 years. Then Israel disappeared and Judah lasted alone another 135 years. After that, no independent Jewish nation existed until the 20th century.

The timeline on the bottom of pages 1351-1357 places the major prophets in the appropriate time period, along with the rulers of their era. Prophets whose names appear in gray boxes spoke to Israel; those listed against a blue background spoke to Judah. (Dating of some rulers is inexact because of overlapping reigns.)



**ISRAEL**

**JEROBOAM I (CONTINUED)**

**NADAB 2 Years**

Jeroboam's son followed the errors of his father in every way, and his reign merits only eight verses. Israel's first dynasty ended abruptly when Nadab fell victim to a murder plot launched by Baasha. (1 Kings 15:25-32)

**BAASHA 24 Years**

After gaining the throne in a violent manner, Baasha lasted 24 years. He showed no inclination to reverse the evil practice begun by Jeroboam. The prophet Jehu predicted his death. (1 Kings 15:33-16:7, 2 Chronicles 16)

**ELAH 2 years**

The Bible records only one incident from Elah's reign: His chariot commander staged a military coup while Elah was off getting drunk. Elah was killed, along with all other descendants of his father, Baasha. Israel's second dynasty, therefore, only lasted 26 years, and another family took the throne. (1 Kings 16:8-14)

**ZIMRI 7 Days**

Evidently, mutinous chariot commander Zimri acted without his army's support. The army revolted against him, and his reign ended seven days after it had begun, in a suicidal fire set in his palace. (1 Kings 16:15-20)

**JUDAH**

**ASA 41 Years**

Asa and his son Jehoshaphat were the only kings mentioned in 1 Kings who did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Second Chronicles gives a much fuller account of Asa's 41 years. He began religious reforms that turned into a kind of wildfire revival. He drove heathen cults out of the land—even removing his own grandmother as queen mother because of her idolatry. Asa also welcomed to Judah many refugees from Israel. Late in his reign he backslid and got bogged down in foreign wars, making an alliance with neighboring Aram to hold Israel at bay. (1 Kings 15:9-24, 2 Chronicles 14-16)

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**ISRAEL**

**OMRI 12 Years**

Secular historians rate Omri as one of Israel's most powerful and capable political rulers. In fact, Assyrian records call Israel "the land of Omri." He outlasted a rival to the throne, expanded Israel's lands, and founded the city of Samaria, which would remain Israel's capital for 150 years. But he gets scant mention in the Bible; it dismisses him for sinning more "than all who were before him." (1 Kings 16:21-28)

**AHAB 22 Years**

In a competition for all-time worst king of Israel, Ahab would win hands down. He married the notorious Jezebel, a pagan priestess who promptly installed Baal worship as Israel's official religion. First Kings departs from its usually brief style to give a detailed treatment of Ahab's life and the great spiritual crisis then. During that time, Elijah appeared on the scene to represent the true God against Queen Jezebel's religion. God gave Ahab plenty of opportunities to reform. Ahab humbled himself at least once, postponing disaster, but a nasty incident over Naboth's vineyard sealed his fate. Politically, Ahab forged a successful alliance with Israel's neighbor, Judah, and the divided kingdoms lived at peace for the first time since Jeroboam. Ultimately, however, his evil practices would spread into Judah. (1 Kings 16:29-22:40, 2 Chronicles 18)

**AHAZIAH 2 years**

Like his father, Ahab, and mother, Jezebel, Ahaziah continued to worship Baal and to fight against Elijah. He was no match. His reign lasted only part of two years, and the descriptions of him reveal a weak, vengeful ruler. (1 Kings 22:40-2 Kings 1:18)

**JORAM 12 Years**

**JUDAH**

**ASA (CONTINUED)**

**JEHOSHAPHAT 25 Years**

Judah enjoyed the rare blessing of two good kings back to back. Jehoshaphat continued the spirit of Asa's rule, and found ways to further it. He sent out princes to teach from the Book of the Law in the cities of Judah and established courts of justice throughout the country. With a large army and well-fortified cities, he attained a level of peace and prosperity rare in Judah's history. His one serious mistake was in linking himself to Israel's wicked king Ahab through marriage and military alliance. (1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Chronicles 17-20)

AHAB

AHAZIAH

JORAM

ELIJAH

JEHOSHAPHAT

885 B.C.  
PROPHETS

ASA

850 B.C.

**ISRAEL**

**JORAM (CONTINUED)**

Although an improvement over his father and mother (Ahab and Jezebel), Joram ultimately failed to do right. He modified some of the worship of Baal, and at times had a respectful relationship with the prophet Elisha. But Joram lived in treacherous times. The nation of Aram was attacking from the east, and God had set in motion an internal plot, led by Jehu, against Ahab's heirs. Finally Joram fell victim to Jehu's arrow, ending the evil dynasty founded by Omri. (2 Kings 3:1-9:26)

**JEHU 28 years**

Not to be confused with the prophet of the same name, this Jehu was a fast-driving, impetuous military man. He began a holy mission to purge Ahab's influence out of Israel and Judah, but considerably overstepped his bounds. He killed Joram, had Jezebel thrown from a window, and slew 70 princes, piling their heads in two heaps by a gate. Then he slew all the priests and prophets of Baal and tricked the worshipers of Baal into a trap that led to a mass slaughter. Unfortunately, Jehu's zeal for violence did not translate into zeal for justice. His actions tore Israel apart for generations, and he did little to attend to the nation's spiritual health. Israel also began to lose political strength. (2 Kings 9-10)

**JUDAH**

**JEHORAM 8 Years**

After 60 good years under Asa and Jehoshaphat, Judah experienced a terrible regression under Jehoram. He began by killing his brothers and then marrying Athaliah, daughter of Israel's Ahab and Jezebel. She promptly led him into Baal worship. Elijah, who mostly prophesied to Israel, sent Judah's king Jehoram a letter predicting the severe bowel disease that would lead to his death. Second Chronicles reports that "he departed with no one's regret." (2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21:1)

**AHAZIAH 1 Year**

In effect, Ahaziah served as a mere puppet representative of the notorious queen Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He fell victim to the bloody purge of Jehu. (2 Kings 8:25-29; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9)

**ATHALIAH 7 Years**

Queen Athaliah first corrupted her husband Jehoram and dominated her son Ahaziah. Then, after Ahaziah's death, she killed off her infant grandchildren to remove rivals to the throne. She ruled Judah for seven years, leading the kingdom into a dark time of Baal worship and evil. Providentially, however, one heir escaped her reach. The young Joash, hidden away by a relative, emerged at the age of seven. This led to a popular revolt against Athaliah. Athaliah, the only woman to rule either of the two kingdoms, was the last of Ahab's family to die. She had come within one baby of wiping out King David's royal line. (2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:21)

**JOASH 40 Years**

**JEHU**

**ELISHA**

850 B.C.

820 B.C.

820 B.C.

JEHORAM

AHAZIAH

ATHALIAH

JOASH

**ISRAEL**

**JEHU (CONTINUED)**

**JEHOAHAZ 17 Years**

After all his father Jehu had done to exterminate Baal worship, Jehoahaz immediately reinstated it. He ruled 17 years, marked by a series of embarrassing military defeats at the hands of neighboring Aram. He did turn to God in desperation at least once, and Israel got some reprieve. (2 Kings 13:1-9)

**JEHOASH 16 Years**

Although Jehoash did not break the evil pattern of Israel's kings, he showed some bright spots. He honored the prophet Elisha, and God allowed him to recover much of the territory that Aram had taken from Israel. (Note that Judah also had a king named Joash, the shortened version of Jehoash.) (2 Kings 13:10-14:16)

**JEROBOAM II 41 Years**

It seems that God gave Israel one last chance under King Jeroboam II. This king ruled a strong and prosperous nation. The Bible gives scant mention of his reign, but it lasted 41 years, during which Israel recovered nearly all its former territory. The prophet Jonah lived then, possibly assisting the king in his frontier defense against Assyria. In addition, Amos and Hosea were active, railing against the terrible social and religious corruption of those affluent times. In a remarkable turn of events, Israel survived as a nation for only a few decades after this stable period. (2 Kings 14:23-29)

**ZECHARIAH 6 Months  
SHALUM 1 Month**

After Jeroboam II, the nation splintered into rival factions. The first king (Zechariah) ruled for six months, the second (Shalum) only one month. Both died violently. (2 Kings 15:8-16)

**JUDAH**

**JOASH (CONTINUED)**

He swept into power at the crest of a revolt against his wicked grandmother Athaliah. And as long as Joash followed the advice of Jehoiada the priest, he did well. Most notably, he organized massive projects to repair the temple. After Jehoiada died, however, Joash allowed idolatry to prosper once more. He strayed so far from the ideals of his youth that he ordered the prophet Zechariah to be stoned—the same Zechariah whose father, Jehoiada, had saved his life. Punishment came swiftly, at the hands of a plundering army. Finally, Joash's own servants turned against him and avenged Zechariah's murder. (2 Kings 12, 2 Chronicles 24)

**AMAZIAH 29 Years**

Second Kings concludes that Amaziah did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his ancestor David. Yet the author mostly comments on Amaziah's failures. He began his rule by executing those who had killed his father. Then he ignored a prophet's advice and attacked Edom, bringing back idols from there. Flush with military success, he launched a foolhardy campaign against Israel. The trouncing that resulted discredited his leadership, and he spent his last 12 years in exile. (2 Kings 14:1-22, 2 Chronicles 25)

**AZARIAH 52 Years**

Called Uzziah in Chronicles, this king reigned some 50 years, the longest of Judah's kings. As a young man, he took advice from a prophet named Zechariah. He built up the army of Judah and worked on its agriculture and water supplies. Until Azariah, Judah had been a struggling kingdom, with enemy fortifications just five miles from Jerusalem. Under him, the nation achieved true strength. Even so, Azariah gets a short review in the Bible because of his spiritual failings. He did not remove the high places, and he violated the Law of Moses by taking on the work of priests himself. (2 Kings 15:1-17, 2 Chronicles 26)

JEHU

JEHOAHAZ

JEHOASH

JEROBOAM II

ELISHA (CONTINUED)

JONAH

AMOS

JOASH

AMAZIAH

AZARIAH

820 B.C.

750 B.C.

**ISRAEL**

**MENAHM 10 Years**

Menahem lasted for ten turbulent years. He gained the throne by murder, and his reign showed a similar ruthlessness. The first of Assyria's three invasions—Israel's "World War I" (see Introduction to 2 Kings)—occurred during Menahem's years, and he frantically tried to buy off the invaders. (2 Kings 15:14-22)

**PEKAHIAH 2 Years**

Israel was quickly sliding toward anarchy and extermination. Pekahiah survived only two years before a military coup overthrew him. (2 Kings 15:23-26)

**PEKAH 20 Years**

Pekah turned to international intrigue and conspiracy. He attempted to dethrone the king of Judah in the South. But Judah bought help from Assyria, which promptly invaded Israel for the second time. After occupying all major cities in Israel except the capital, Samaria, Assyria began deporting thousands of conquered Israelites to other lands. (2 Kings 15:27-31)

**HOSHEA 9 Years**

The Bible judges Hoshea as less wicked than some of his predecessors. Nevertheless, Israel's death was certain. Hoshea angered Assyria by turning south to Egypt for aid. The Assyrians attacked, and after a terrible three-year siege, the last stronghold, Samaria, fell to the conquerors. Assyria deported the vast majority of Israel's population, who became the "ten lost tribes of Israel." (2 Kings 17)

**JUDAH**

**AZARIAH (CONTINUED)**

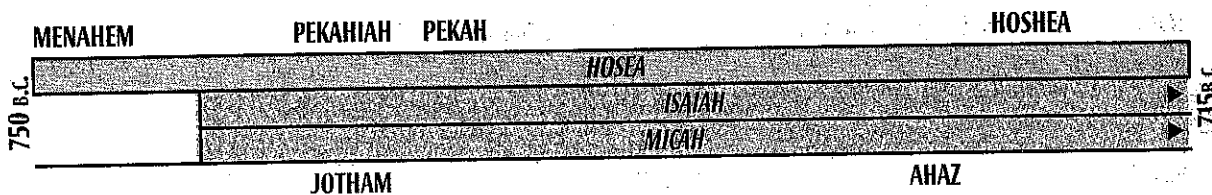
**JOTHAM 16 Years**

After serving as Azariah's proxy king for 15 years (while Azariah was quarantined with leprosy), Jotham took over and continued the practices of his father. He expanded Judah's economic and military strength, but did not pursue religious reforms as fully as he should have. (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27)

**AHAZ 16 Years**

At the very moment AHAZ was being crowned, armies from the North led by King Pekah of Israel were marching into Judah. AHAZ ignored the prophet Isaiah's advice to put his trust in God rather than military alliances. Turning to the mighty empire of Assyria, he purchased aid with treasures from the temple and the king's palace. The strategy worked temporarily. Israel's armies withdrew to defend themselves. But AHAZ opened the doors for later Assyrian invasions of Judah itself. Worse, he made copies of foreign gods and set them up in Jerusalem. Under him, religion in Judah took a precipitous drop. He went so far as to sacrifice his sons in the fire following the detestable ways of foreign nations. (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28)

**ASSYRIAN INVASION**



715 B.C.

## ASSYRIAN INVASION

## ONLY JUDAH SURVIVES

**HEZEKIAH 29 Years**

King Hezekiah gets full treatment in both Kings and Chronicles. The first book stresses the political side of his reign while the second reports on his religious reforms. Both were impressive. Hezekiah was one of the best and most important kings of Judah. He immediately stopped idolatry by reopening and cleansing the temple and calling for a period of national repentance. He resurrected the Passover celebration, and worship in Israel reached a peak that had not been seen since the time of David and Solomon. In all this, he listened carefully to advice from the prophet Isaiah. Yet Hezekiah hardly lived in a peaceful era. He faced imminent danger from Assyria and barely survived an invasion and siege. God honored his faithfulness with a miraculous military intervention. In an unprecendented act, he also added 15 years to Hezekiah's life. (2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chronicles 29–32; Isaiah 36–39)

**MANASSEH 55 Years**

Whatever good Hezekiah had accomplished in his exemplary reign, his son Manasseh undid in 55 years of the worst rule in Judah's history. He reversed Hezekiah's reforms, bringing in all forms of idolatry, including the occult and witchcraft. He killed off prophets, erected idols in God's temple, and sacrificed his own sons on the altar of a heathen god. The Assyrian empire took Manasseh prisoner, leading him away with a hook through his nose. Later he repented, but great damage had been done. After Manasseh, God pronounced a final judgment on the future of Judah. (2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chronicles 33:1–20)

715 B.C.

ISAIAH (CONTINUED)

MICAH (CONTINUED)

HEZEKIAH

MANASSEH

640 B.C.

**ONLY JUDAH SURVIVES**

**AMON 2 Years**

Amon merely continued the practices of his father. He died at the hands of his servants. (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

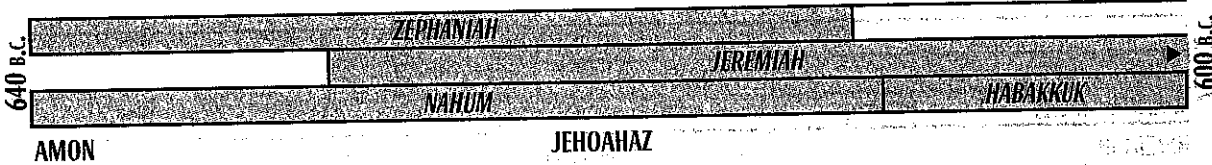
**JOSIAH 31 Years**

Judah's slide to destruction was interrupted by the amazing rule of its all-time best king. Josiah came to the throne at age eight, but received good counsel from the high priests. In 31 years he carried out the most extensive religious reforms Judah had ever seen. He removed and destroyed the altars, tools, and symbols of ungodly worship from the temple and destroyed pagan centers throughout the land. In a thrilling sequence of events, he oversaw the rediscovery of the Law of Moses and acted immediately on what it taught. No king equals Josiah for his sincere and devout practices. He even extended his reforms into the decimated regions of Israel in the North.

Josiah had a time of military peace, for during his reign the Assyrian empire was disintegrating. But he unwisely thrust himself into international politics by marching against Egypt. (The prophet Jeremiah had urged against the Egyptian campaign.) Judah would never recover from this fatal mistake, for Josiah died suddenly in battle. His death shocked the nation. After Josiah's death, Egypt installed a puppet king, and no one after him had the ability to rally Judah's religious or political strength. (2 Kings 22:1-23:30; 2 Chronicles 34-35)

**JEHOAHAZ 3 Months**

The third son of Josiah lasted only three months before being sacked by a pharaoh and carried off in chains. (2 Kings 23:30-34; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4)



640 B.C.



**JUDAH**

**JEHOIAKIM 11 Years**  
 Installed by an Egyptian pharaoh, Jehoiakim found himself trapped when Egypt was defeated by a surging Babylon. He quickly shifted allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. One of Judah's worst kings, he stubbornly tried to have the prophet Jeremiah put to death. (Numerous passages in Jeremiah's book make plain his scorn for Jehoiakim.) Finally, after an ill-advised revolt against Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim was captured and killed. (2 Kings 23:36-24:6; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8)

**JEHOIACHIN 3 Months**  
 The struggles with Babylon were the "World War II" in Israel's history (see Introduction to 2 Kings). After holding out for three months against Nebuchadnezzar's armies, Jehoiachin surrendered, and was carried away with many other captives, including the prophet Ezekiel. He lived in a Babylonian prison for 40 years. (2 Kings 24:6-17; 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:8-10)

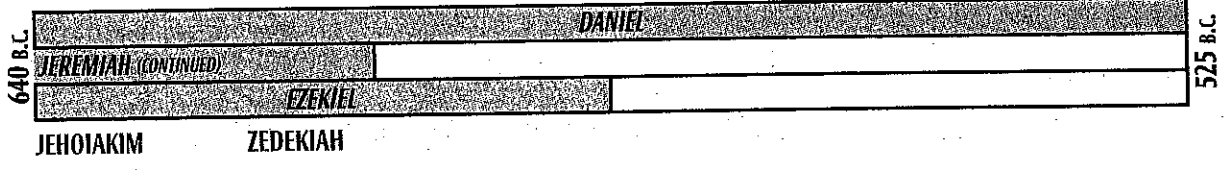
**ZEDEKIAH 11 Years**  
 Zedekiah ruled over Judah during the last 11 years of its existence as an independent state. A weak king, he took bad advice from princes and advisers and often made unwise decisions. He ignored Jeremiah's advice to remain loyal to Babylon and joined an alliance against that empire. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for almost two years, bringing the city to the verge of starvation. At last the Babylonians made a breach in the wall and overran the city. They burned Solomon's temple, the king's palace, and other buildings, and destroyed the walls around Jerusalem. Finally they took everything of value from the temple. The city was utterly looted. (2 Kings 24:17-25:7; 2 Chronicles 26:11-20)

**BABYLONIAN INVASION**

Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi prophesied later, to the Jewish refugees who had returned from Babylon.

**586 B.C. BABYLONIAN INVASION**

600 B.C.  
**BAKKUK**



a deeper, more spiritual meaning. Thus the description of love between a man and a woman has been interpreted to refer to the love of God for Israel, or to the love of Christ for his church.

**ISAIAH** The book of Isaiah falls into three divisions. The first unit, chapters 1-39, is made up of prophecies from Isaiah, a prophet who was active in Judah from about 742 to 701 B.C., a period when the growing Assyrian Empire was moving westward. In 722 B.C., Sargon, the Assyrian king, conquered the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Judah, though forced to pay tribute, retained its national identity. However, there was tremendous pressure on the Southern Kingdom to take sides in the power struggle between Assyria and Egypt.

Isaiah, a man of some standing in Jerusalem, persistently warned that Judah should not ally herself with any earthly power. God would protect the people if they trusted God alone.

The second division of the book, chapters 40-55, comes from a different author many years later, about 540 B.C. It contains sermons to the exiles in Babylon. The anonymous prophet is known as Second, or Deutero, Isaiah.

The changed historical situation shines through these messages. After being captive in Babylon for more than half a century, the Jews were looking with fascination at the rise of a new conquerer, Cyrus the Persian. He had won control of lands on three sides of Babylon and was apparently preparing to move in for the kill.

In all this, the prophet of the exile saw the hand of God opening a door of freedom for his people. His poems, among the most beautiful in Scripture, ring out themes of comfort, hope, coming deliverance, and redemption. They are filled with assurances of Yahweh's love for the Hebrew people.

They also point to a new role for them, that of servant. Four poems in

particular show God's will that the people, through patience, suffering, and spreading their knowledge of God, should be God's light to the nations. The last in this series, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is the famous Suffering Servant passage. The Christian church has always understood the suffering of Christ on the cross as the supreme example of the creative suffering described in Isaiah 52-53.

The last division, chapters 56-66, which may or may not have come from Deutero-Isaiah, reflects a still later historical situation. Leaders from the exile have returned to Jerusalem. Former glorious hopes have faded, and the prophet tries to inspire the community to serve God faithfully. He looks ahead to a new deliverance, a mighty action of Yahweh that will make Jerusalem the religious center of a world converted to serving God. This kind of prophetic dream, not based upon historical events then in progress, is known as apocalyptic.

Many passages in Isaiah are familiar because of their use in music and from frequent (120 times) quotations in the New Testament.

**JEREMIAH** Jeremiah lived about 100 years after Isaiah, during the religious reforms begun by King Josiah. He criticized the shallowness of these reforms, and as he warned, they apparently did not last. Jeremiah's preaching seemed to be ineffective too. The king cut up his book of prophecies. Jeremiah was put into prison as a traitor and contradicted by false prophets. Those who respected him either had little influence or were afraid to follow his advice.

Perhaps partly because of the lack of response to his message, added to the fact that he had to talk so much about coming punishment, Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. He often expressed his misgivings to God, and this is recorded in the book. But

these moments of doubt were between himself and God alone. When he faced the people he showed great courage and carried out his task faithfully, as he condemned the sins of the people and the nation.

Jeremiah had a strong positive message as well. His purpose in warning about coming punishment was always to cause people to repent so God wouldn't have to carry out the judgment. And he held out hope for a better day to come. Jeremiah promised a return of the Jews from exile in 70 years. He also saw, far in the future, a "day of the Lord" when all evil would be overcome. Then God would establish a new covenant with the people, based on the forgiveness of their sin, and everyone would know and obey God (Jer. 31:31-34).

We owe the present book of Jeremiah to his faithful scribe Baruch who preserved many of the prophet's sermons and meditations, adding to them biographical material of his own.

**LAMENTATIONS** The year 587 B.C. brought disaster on Judah. Jerusalem was sacked and burned. The temple was destroyed. Five hundred years of rule by the Davidic dynasty ended. Babylonian guards herded many of the people into exile.

Lamentations consists of five poems lamenting or expressing sorrow over the fall of Jerusalem. The poems give a vivid description of the destruction of the city and with great feeling tell of the sufferings and anguish of the people. Yet the tone is neither bitter nor self-righteous. God was righteous in bringing this judgment, the writer says. He confesses his nation's sin and calls on the people to repent.

And beyond punishment, what? God does not afflict human beings willingly or without a purpose. Lamentations voices the faith that God will forgive and restore the covenant relationship with the chosen people, Israel.

Tradition, in keeping with its tendency to assign anonymous writings to well-known persons, ascribes these psalms of lament to Jeremiah. But Lamentations may be the work of more than one author, reflecting on the tragedy that fell upon Jerusalem.

**EZEKIEL** Ezekiel, a priest, preached to the Jewish people during the first part of their exile in Babylon. He was among the thousands of Jews who were deported from Jerusalem when the Babylonians defeated Judah in 597 B.C. His message, at least to begin with, was not one to comfort the exiles. Even the tragedy of their exile had not brought them back to faith in God. They felt sure they would soon be returned to Jerusalem, whether or not they turned to God.

Ezekiel told them their exile would last a long time, and that Jerusalem would be destroyed. In part, Ezekiel's message was an explanation of why God had allowed his people to be conquered. He pointed out that God had repeatedly withheld punishment the people deserved. They had finally been destroyed because they were guilty of all kinds of sin.

Later, Ezekiel encouraged the exiles to look forward to a time of restoration. When some, believing they were helplessly suffering for the sins of their ancestors, became discouraged, Ezekiel preached the doctrine of individual responsibility. God would deal with them on the basis of their own actions and not on the basis of what their ancestors did.

A long section, chapters 25-32, contains prophecies against the nations. The judgment on his own people will be followed by a reckoning with the world powers. Justice will be done because God is both just and ruler of the earth.

The concluding section, chapters 33-48, is Ezekiel's vision of the future with God in full control. God will give his

people a change of heart so that they will abide in holiness. And God will set them on a cleansed land, in a new community centered around the temple, rather than the royal palace.

The book of Ezekiel is full of unusual and often puzzling elements: visions, allegories, parables, proverbs. His language is similar to that of the Revelation of John. His messages are also very similar to those of Jeremiah, who probably had an influence on Ezekiel. In the face of impending judgment, both prophets hold out the possibility of hope because of the mercy of God.

**DANIEL** After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., the Jews came under the political control of his successors. Conditions were tolerable until one of the Syrian rulers, Antiochus IV, decided to stamp out Judaism in his tiny subject state of Judah. He underestimated the stubborn faith of the worshipers of Yahweh. Many died rather than deny their religion. A rebellion started that incredibly succeeded in winning independence.

The account of this story in 1 and 2 Maccabees (part of the Old Testament Apocrypha) helps us to understand the book of Daniel, which was most likely written about 167 B.C., when the persecution was the hottest. The writer of Daniel chose the exile as the setting for the book, because setting the characters amidst the events of the day may have caused instant censorship. The author's intention was to encourage other Jews to resist Antiochus to the death. God, he said in the latter part of his book, would defeat the foe and give victory to the people.

The first six chapters include stories about how Yahweh rescued faithful Jews from the fiery furnace and from the jaws of the lions. The point of these stories is that the heroes stood up faithfully for their religion in the face of death. By the power of God they came through. So you, the writer implies,

may trust in our God. God, not our Syrian tyrant, will have the last word.

Using the literary form of the vision, in chapters 7-11 the writer reviews the history of the four great empires that had ruled over the Jews since the decline of the kingdom after Josiah. He uses animal symbolism: a lion for Babylon, a bear for the Medes, and a leopard for the Persians. A fourth with horns and great iron teeth and bronze claws stood for the Greeks (7:1-8).

In Daniel 11:31 and 12:11, mention is made of the "abomination that desolates." This is an indirect reference to the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem by Antiochus, an act remembered with horror ever since. It is described in 1 Maccabees 1:54.

We cannot interpret all the symbols in Daniel, but when he writes of the history close to his own time his clues are unmistakable.

The author did not look to the zealous Jews who fought with the sword to save his people. He relied on the supreme power of God. Unlike Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who walked away from the superheated furnace unscathed, there were many who were killed resisting Antiochus. The author believed that God would bring these faithful ones to life again (12:2). This is the first clear statement of the resurrection hope in the Old Testament.

**HOSEA** The book of Hosea is the first of the Book of the Twelve, also known as the Minor Prophets. Hosea lived in the prosperous period when Jeroboam II ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel around 750 B.C. Hosea knew only too well the moral and religious sickness of his people. Many worshipped the god Baal.

A broken home and an unfaithful wife are the basis for the message of Hosea. Hosea was told to marry a prostitute. After a time she left him. Later he found her in a slave market, bought

her, and brought her back to live with him as his wife. This, Hosea said, was similar to the relationship between the Israelites and God. They had committed spiritual adultery. They had broken their covenant with God and had been unfaithful to the One who loved them. It was not just a matter of wrong deeds and broken laws; more serious was their indifference to God's great love. Yet in the face of this rejection by the people, God continued to love them and was willing to take them back, as Hosea had taken back his wife.

**JOEL** Little is known of the prophet Joel, except that he was the son of Pethuel (1:1). He probably prophesied to the people of Judah sometime after the return from exile in Babylon (3rd-4th centuries B.C.). Joel has also been associated with the temple in Jerusalem and because of this has been called a "cultic prophet."

The occasion for Joel's message was a plague of locusts, described in chapters 1 and 2. Joel implied that this had come upon the people because of their sins. But he was more concerned to interpret it as a preview of greater destruction to come. This would take place in the Day of the Lord, a time of judgment that was close at hand and that would also be fulfilled to a greater extent in the distant future.

Yet Joel pointed out that this day of judgment could also be a day of salvation for some, because God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (2:13). He repeatedly called on the people to repent and return to the Lord. If they did this, he promised, they would be saved. His prophecy that God would pour his spirit on all flesh (2:28) was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.).

**AMOS** Amos, a contemporary of Hosea, was a shepherd who made a living from his flocks and sycamore

trees. This unprophet, as he called himself, was inspired to speak the word of the Lord so forcefully that a modern reader can still feel the impact. The book of Amos preserves for us some of his sermons and a brief account of a confrontation he had with the priest Amaziah.

Periodically Amos traveled from his hometown, Tekoa in Judah, to market cities in the Northern Kingdom. There he observed the evils that still plague urban centers today: degrading poverty, corruption of justice, oppression of the lower classes by the rich, luxuries without regard for cost and at the expense of honesty and integrity.

Outwardly, religion was flourishing. The royal sanctuary at Bethel enjoyed an abundant share of the expanding economy. Sacrifices were regular and generous.

Amos, however, measured Israel by the rightness of her deeds, as shown in the whole life of the people, rather than by attention to God in the sanctuary. His indictments of the specific sins of particular groups of people remains today one of the most impressive statements of the justice of God. He condemned empty worship practices and proclaimed that true faith was more than participation in religious rituals. He urges, in a key passage, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (5:24).

The heart of his message expresses the grief of God over the people's sin, and he appeals to them to "see the Lord and live." The warnings of Amos apparently went unheeded, as the day of the Lord's judgment did come (6:11-14).

After the heavy note of judgment throughout the book, Amos closes with an unexpected message of hope (9:11-15). The Day of the Lord will be a time of restoration as well as of punishment, and will finally bring the kind of world God wants.

prophet Nahum (the name means "comfort") predicted the event in some of the most striking poetry in the Old Testament. Chapters 2 and 3 brilliantly describe the attack and defense of the city. The closing lines are like a triumphant shout: "All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?" (3:19).

Only the relatively short oracle on Nineveh remains out of all that Nahum prophesied. Though its single-minded attention to the wrath of God is understandable, it should be balanced with the broader view of Jonah that God loved even Nineveh.

**HABAKKUK** The theme of Habakkuk is similar to that of the book of Job. The prophet complained that God was allowing wickedness to triumph. God replied that he was doing something about it by "rousing the Chaldeans" to bring punishment on the sins of Judah. At that, Habakkuk wondered how God could permit the Jews to be punished by the people of the nation of Chaldea, for they were even more wicked. God asked him to be patient. Eventually all the wicked would be dealt with; only the righteous would live—by faith (2:4). This thought is picked up and given deeper meaning by Paul (Rom. 1:17).

Habakkuk 1:2—2:5 is a dialog between the prophet and God; next, 2:6-20 consists of five prophetic woe oracles; and chapter 3 is more like a psalm in the form of a prayer, which may have been used as liturgy in worship.

Little is known about Habakkuk, but he probably lived about the same time as Jeremiah and prophesied sometime just before 600 B.C., when the Chaldeans were coming to power.

**ZEPHANIAH** Zephaniah is a voice of judgment. The book's opening statement threatened destruction on the entire earth. This judgment was applied

first of all to Judah and Jerusalem, then to the surrounding nations. It was a punishment, especially on Judah, for the sin of idolatry, which had resulted in corrupt officials and faithless people. But it was also punishment for an attitude of total indifference toward God.

In the midst of these predictions came an appeal to seek the Lord. Zephaniah did not feel that the judgment could be avoided, but some individuals might be saved. He spoke of the Day of the Lord not only as a time of punishment, but also as a time when God would carry out good intentions for people. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.), probably before the king's religious reforms.

**HAGGAI** Haggai's aim was to arouse the people to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The incidents related in the book took place in 520 B.C., after the Jews had returned to their homes from exile in Babylon. They had begun rebuilding the temple, but stopped after laying a foundation. For about 16 years nothing more was done. Then Haggai and Zechariah began to urge leaders of the Judean community to finish the job.

Haggai's messages deal with common excuses: the time isn't right; this isn't the way it used to be; we don't see enough results; there's too much opposition. He criticized the people for building luxurious homes for themselves while God's house lay in ruins. He said the famine was the result of their selfish neglect of God's cause. The people began building, but easily gave up and had to be urged on again. However, largely as a result of Haggai's message, the temple was completed in four years.

**ZECHARIAH** The prophecies of Zechariah likely date from two periods in Israel's history. The first eight chapters date from 520 to 518 B.C. and par-

allel Haggai's concerns about a rebuilt temple and a call for the people to a pure faith in God. This message is revealed in a series of visions that were apparently meant to assure the people that God was protecting them. The nations threatening Judah would be scattered, he said, and Jerusalem's future would be greater than its past.

The second major section of the book (chaps. 9-14) is thought to contain prophetic material from a later period, probably Greek (9:13). The symbolism, imagery, and allusions in this section are hard to identify and seem to point to a period in the future when God's messiah will again rule. For this reason they are often called apocalyptic.

Certain passages are of special interest to Christians, especially that of the Good Shepherd (13:7-9) and the king who was to come to Jerusalem riding on an ass (9:9), both of which found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament (see Matt. 21:5; 26:31).

**MALACHI** Although Malachi stands at the end of the Old Testament in our Bible, it was not the last book to be written. Its 11 short oracles fall between the completion of the second temple, 516 B.C., and Nehemiah's first visit to Jerusalem, 445 B.C.

Judah had settled into a dull twilight of apathy. Its glories lay in the past, and there was no stirring of hope for the future. Yahweh seemed to have left the people to their own business.

Malachi picks up the complaints of his day: Does God love us? What use are religious ceremonies? What's so wrong about divorce? Does God really punish the wicked?

For Malachi, fidelity to the Lord's covenant and its teachings were of key importance. That's why he stressed pure worship, marrying only those within the Jewish community of faith, and the blessings of obedience.

Malachi prophesied a final, or eschatological, day of judgment when

Yahweh would uphold those of his people who were faithful and destroy the wicked.

**MATTHEW** Because it connects prophecies from the Old Testament with their fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus, Matthew appropriately comes first in the New Testament. Sixteen of the more than 60 Old Testament references quoted in Matthew concern specific prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. The purpose of the book, which seems to be written mainly for Jewish readers; is to show that Jesus is the Messiah or Savior whom God had long before promised to send. Jewish readers would be interested not only in such Old Testament prophecies, but also in the legal descent of anyone who claimed to be the Christ. This genealogy is given in the opening chapter.

Although he presented Jesus as Messiah of the Jews, Matthew had a broader vision that is reflected in his second chapter, where he tells the story of the wise men of the East who pay homage to the child of Bethlehem. And he ends his book with the command, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (28:19).

The book of Matthew basically follows the chronological series of events as given in the Gospel of Mark. Major divisions of the book come at 4:17 and at 16:21. The first four and a half chapters tell of Christ's preparation for his ministry. The middle section deals especially with his teachings, and from 16:21 to the end is concerned with his sufferings and death. The anonymous writer, writing between A.D. 80-90, probably used Mark and other written and oral sources to construct this gospel. The title bearing Matthew's name probably came at a later time.

Matthew presents Jesus as a great teacher and likes to quote him at length. Speeches mark the beginning and end of his ministry, Christ's sayings are grouped around reports of var-