

Old Testament part 2 Full text of talk.

14.9.2016

I am using voice recognition software to type this. Occasionally it replaces what I have said with another similar sounding word, like profit instead of prophet. I usually notice and correct it, but please tell me you notice any glitches of this sort. E.A.P.

Poetry/Wisdom

Job – Job, an upright man, is tested by the devil with God’s permission, in suffering loss of all his livestock and his 10 children, and then being afflicted with painful sores. Three friends came to comfort him, but they thought he was being judged by God for sins, and they urged him to repent. In a series of magnificent discourses with them Job asserts that he has done nothing wrong, and he complains of God’s and his friend’s treatment of him. In the end God speaks, showing Job how little he knows. Job repents of what he has said, and God blesses him with twice as many livestock as before, and with 10 more children. There is always more to learn from reading Job.

Psalms – a collection of individual and congregational songs of praise, prayers, laments, wisdom songs, thanksgivings for creation, expressions of repentance, thanksgivings for deliverance, calls for righteous judgement, statements of faith and/or wisdom, pilgrimage songs, Temple festival songs, and wedding songs. Some of them we sing in our services in metrical hymns and modern songs. About half of the Psalms were written by King David, who was called “Israel’s singer of songs” (2 Samuel 23.1). Twelve were written by The Sons of Korah, a hereditary group of temple officials. Ten were written by Asaph, one of David’s musicians, or by his descendants. One was by Moses, another by King Solomon, and a number are anonymous.

From time to time it is good to begin Bible reading with a psalm. There is always more to learn from them too. Quite a number of psalms can be a help to those passing through difficulties.

13 psalms are stated in their prefaces to be connected to some known event or events in the life of David, before or after he became king of God's people. It can be helpful to pencil the numbers of these psalms into the relevant places in the books of Samuel. This reminds us to read these psalms after reading, in 1 and 2 Samuel, the events which led to them being written. This enhances understanding of these psalms. If you wish to do this, here they are –

After 1 Samuel 19.11, when Saul was first trying to kill David, note Psalm 59.

After 1 Samuel 21 - when the Philistines in Gath had seized David, and when David had escaped from their king by feigning madness, note Psalms 56 and 34.

After 1 Samuel 22.2, when David had taken refuge in the cave of Adullam, note Psalms 57 and 142.

After 1 Samuel 22.23, about the betrayer Doeg, note Psalm 52.

After 1 Samuel 23.14, when David had been hiding from Saul in the desert, note Psalm 63.

After 1 Samuel 23.20 when the Ziphites had reported David's whereabouts to Saul, note Psalm 54.

David had become king, Psalm 60 is difficult to place; perhaps it is best noted after 2 Samuel 8.14.

After 2 Samuel 12.17, when David repented of his great sin against Uriah, note Psalm 51.

After 2 Samuel 16.14, note Psalm 3, in which David expresses confidence that the Lord will deliver him from his son Absalom's rebellion.

Psalm 18, David’s great song of thanksgiving, is also included in 2 Samuel as its chapter 22.

Finally Psalm 30 was composed by David in advance, for the dedication of the temple in his son King Solomon’s reign, as described in 1 Kings 8.

Proverbs – chapters 1 – 9 are an encouragement to listen to Wisdom, and especially to avoid immorality; chapters 10 – 29 are mostly eminently sensible two-line proverbs; chapters 30 - 31 are postscripts. Here are some two-liners: 12.1 “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid”; 12.16 “A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult”; 13.20 “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm”; 15.27 “A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live; 16.31 “Grey hair is a crown or splendour; it is attained by a righteous life”; 19.13-14 “A foolish son is his father’s ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping. Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, ; But a prudent wife is from the Lord”; 20.3 “It is to a man’s honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel; 20.19 “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much; 29.1 “A man who remains after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed - without remedy”; 29.15 “The rod of correction imparts, wisdom but a child left to himself graces his mother” .

Ecclesiastes - The writer, Solomon or a descendant of his, wrestles with the purpose of life, as in his opening 1.2-9 “Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the teacher. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What does a man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the Earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the scene, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from there they return again. All things are wearisome more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun”.

He concludes 12.13-14 “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil”.

There is a very good analysis of this book in the New Bible Dictionary.

Song of Solomon – a duologue between the Beloved (she), and the Lover (he) – the book beautifully describes and celebrates love between a man and a woman, but it can also be taken as an allegory of the church and Jesus.

Examples: 4.9-12 *Lover*: “You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain”.

5.10-16 *Beloved*: “My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

Major Prophets - Main theme of all prophets: Call to repent; judgement for those who do not, and blessing on those who do; future restoration. The clear Biblical message of just judgement is largely

ignored by the compilers of the Lectionary. The Western world needs to hear the message of judgement and the call to repentance.

Isaiah – prophecy to Judah (southern kingdom) - all one book, written over a long period, so his style changes. Difficult to summarise. After some introductory chapters (1-5), Isaiah recounts his vision (chapter 6). Chapter 7 describes his encounter with King Ahaz. Some messianic passages follow, including 7.14 (Immanuel), 9.2-7 (“A son is given”), 11.1-6 (“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him”). Prophecies for other nations (chapters 13-24) are followed by some mostly encouraging prophecies for Judah (25-35), and the account of the king of Assyria’s failed attack on Jerusalem and other events in the reign of King Hezekiah (36-39).

Chapters 40-55, written for the time of the later exile of Judah, are the high point of the book and indeed of the O.T. for example 40.1-5 “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken’.”

40.28-31 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth; he will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no-one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the part of the weak, even though they grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

43.1-3a “But now, this is what the Lord says - he who created you, O Jacob he who formed you, O Israel; ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the holy one of Israel, your saviour.”

44.13-17 “The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a God and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.’ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘save me; you are my God.’”

44.24-28 “This is what the Lord says - your redeemer, who formed you in the womb; I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the Earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfils the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited,’ of the towns of Judah, ‘They shall be built,’ and of their ruins, ‘I will restore them,’ who says to the watery deep, ‘Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,’ who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my Shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid’”.

52.7-10 “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, to proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Listen! Your watchman lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”

55.1-2, 6-12 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.... Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways’, declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands’ “

These chapters 40-55 include the four Suffering Servant Songs - 42.1-7; 49.1-7; 50.4-9; 52.13 – 53.12. Chapters 56-66 cover a variety of topics.

Jeremiah - prophecy to Judah (southern kingdom) - The bravest prophet. Called by God when young; told not to marry (16.2); given the task of repeatedly warning the people of Judah of coming judgement, but very little notice is taken of him. His six passages of complaints to God, sometimes called his confessions, show his struggles with his difficult calling – 11.18-23; 12.1-4; 15.10-21; 17.12-18; 18.18-23; 20.7-18. At various times in his long life and ministry he was beaten, put in the stocks, put under house arrest, imprisoned, had his scroll burned by the king, was put down a cistern (a well), and he was finally forced to go to Egypt. *How to read Jeremiah chronologically sheet.*

Here are a few verses. His call: 1.4-8 “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations’. ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord’ I said ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, I am only a child. You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, ‘ declares the Lord. “

One of his many warnings: 13.15-17 “Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for life, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom. But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord flock will be taken captive.”

The end of his final complaint: 20.18” Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?

Some words from his letter to those already exiled: 29.10-13 “This is what the Lord says: ‘when seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you’ declares the Lord ‘plans to prosper you

and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Lamentations - Five Lamentations, perhaps by Jeremiah, for destroyed Jerusalem – but there is an encouraging passage 3.19-26 “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the ball. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within the. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

Ezekiel - prophecy to his fellow earlier exiles in Babylon. The strangest and most neglected major prophet. Begins with an amazing vision of God, followed by God’s call to him to be a watchman and to foretell the final fall of Jerusalem and exile of the remaining inhabitants. Chapters 25 to 32 of prophecies against other nations, similar to those spoken by Isaiah and Jeremiah. News of the fall of Jerusalem reaches him in chapter 33. Chapters 34 to 37 contain encouragements for the future, including the vision of the valley of dry bones. Chapters 40 to 47 were written by him later; they describe the vision of a new temple in Jerusalem.

Here are some verses. His calling: 3.17-19 “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so here the word is and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.”

A warning from the Lord: 7.1-4 “the word of the Lord came to me ‘Son of man, this is what the sovereign Lord says to the land of Israel: the end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. The end is now upon you and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity for Spain; I will surely repay you for your conduct and the detestable practices among. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

The Lord’s promises for the future: 36.24-28 “For I will take you out of the nation; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in and move you to follow my decree and be careful to keep my law. You will live in the land I gave to your forefathers; you will be my people, I will be your God.”

Daniel – chapters 1-6 are historical (in Babylon), including the fiery furnace, the writing on the wall, the lions’ den. Chapters 7-12 are prophetic - prophecies about rulers and nations in the future, including in chapter 9 Daniel’s prayer on behalf of the nation.

Here are a few short passages. His response to being asked to eat food which was unclean for Jewish people: 1.11-15 “Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ‘Please test your servants for ten days: give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.’ So he agreed to

this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.”

The outcome for his three friends who were cast into a fiery furnace: 3.26-27 “Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’ So Shadrach, Mishael and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of the head singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.”

Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall: 5.25-31 “this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed round his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of 62.”

Part of Daniel’s prayer of repentance 9.7-8 “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame - the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.”

Part of Daniel’s final vision: 12.1-4 “at that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book - will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”

(Liberals’ unbelief, for example about Isaiah naming King Cyrus 150 years ahead, and Daniel’s visions of the future, leads liberals to date the writing of parts of some books much later than their author’s lifetime. But for those who believe in a God of miracles prophecy should be no problem.)

Minor Prophets

Hosea - prophecy chiefly to Israel (northern kingdom), which was also called Ephraim which was its largest tribe, but also to Judah (southern kingdom). In chapters 1-3 God told Hosea to marry an adulterous wife and to love her as an illustration of God’s love for his unfaithful, spiritually adulterous, people.

A few verses: God’s charge against Israel: 4.1-2 “Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘there is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.’”

Sin will be judged: 5.9-12 “Ephraim (an alternative name for the northern kingdom, the name of its largest tribe) will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain. Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them

like a flood of water. Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgement, intent on pursuing idols. I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah.”

The Lord’s final call to repentance: 14.1-2 “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.’”

Joel - unknown date, presumably after the exile of the northern kingdom, as no reference is made to Israel - an invasion of locusts leads to a call to repentance, followed by a later outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Some verses: the locust invasion: 1.4 “What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.”

The call to repentance: 2.12-14 “‘Even now’, declares the Lord, ‘return to be with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.”

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit: fulfilled on the day of Pentecost after Jesus’s ascension 2.28-32a “And afterwards, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Amos - prophecy to Israel (northern kingdom) and neighbouring nations - warnings of judgement to the rich and a plea for justice for the poor – a memorable passage: 5.21-24 “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

Obadiah - warning of judgement on the people of Edom, because of their failure to help Judah in their day of trouble. Verses 14-15 “ ‘I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given, ‘ says the Lord your God.

(When you get to heaven and meet Obadiah, what will you say when he asks “What did you think of my book?”)

Jonah – a successful mission, after God’s second call, to Nineveh, capital of Assyria: 3.4- 4.2 “on the first day, Jonas started into the city. He proclaimed: ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned’. The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: do not let any man or beast, heard or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with

sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.' When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, 'O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.'"

God's final word: 4.11 "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many capital as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Micah - prophecy to northern and southern kingdoms - warnings of judgement; promise of future deliverance. Two memorable verses: 5.2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."; and 6.8 "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Nahum - warning of judgement on Nineveh, over a century after Jonah's mission. 1.2, 7-8 "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. ... The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh: he will pursue his foes into darkness."

Habakkuk - prophecy in Judah (southern kingdom) - two complaints to God and God's answers, and a prayer.

The first complaint: 1.3 "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds."

The Lord's answer: 1.6 "I am raising up the Babylonian, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling-places not their own."

The second complaint: 1.13 "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

The Lord's answer about judgement on Babylon 2.16 "You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming round to you, and disgrace will cover your glory."

Some wonderful final words from Habakkuk's prayer: 3.17-18 "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour."

Zephaniah - prophecy to Judah (southern kingdom) and others - warnings of judgement on Judah and other nations, and promise of restoration of Jerusalem.

Firstly a warning: 1.4-6 "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests - those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the Lord and to also swear by Molech, those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord your enquire of him."

Secondly a promise: 3.15-17 "The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the king of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not get your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save, he will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Haggai - a call to the returned exiles to start rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, 1.3-4 "Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?'"

And after they had started, promises of blessing. 2.8-9 "'The silver is mine and the gold is mine', declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace', declares the Lord Almighty."

Zechariah - prophecy to the returned exiles in Judah. Contemporary of Haggai. Chapters 1-8 a series of visions related to the rebuilding of the temple, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Chapters 9-14 the coming of the Messiah, and the future of Jerusalem - not easy to understand.

Well-known verses: 4.6 "So he said to me 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel 'Not by my nor by power, but by my spirit,' says the Lord Almighty'."

And 9.9-10 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

Malachi – corrections from the Lord for the returned exiles, 1.7-8 "You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' 'By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?' Says the Lord Almighty."

And 2.13-14 "Another thing you do: you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offering or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask 'Why?' It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."

And 3.10 "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

And foretelling of the coming of John the Baptist. 3.1-2 and 4.5-6 "' See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his

temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come' says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap ... See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come strike the land with a curse".

EAP