

PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE LEADERS
Early Leaders in the Rise of the Nation
Early Prophets

November 4, 2020

Work of the Chronicler

Old Epic tradition (J and E) started to develop during the time of the Tribal Confederacy.

Israelite narrative needed to expand beyond the Exodus and Mount Sinai.

Outline went back to the beginning of human history.

Writers reinterpreted the past in such a way that it could speak to their own situation.

- 1) J (Yahwist) retold stories to reflect the promises made to Abraham.
He made the connection that those promises were fulfilled in the time of David and Solomon.
- 2) Later on the E (Elohist) version of the Israelite narrative was produced.
It reflected the interests of the Northern Kingdom.
- 3) Around 587 BC the Deuteronomist historian wrote from his perspective.
His focus was on the deliverance of the people from Egypt and the making of the covenant.
- 4) Chronicler was a school of historical interpreters active in post-exilic period.
Books of Ezra and Nehemiah pick up the history of Israel from the first return to Jerusalem.
It ends with the second term of Nehemiah as governor of Judah (from 538 – 400 BC).

Role of all the writers was to *interpret* the past.

Materials (stories) would be selected that would emphasize aspects of tradition relevant to times.

Work of the Chronicler was fundamentally a revision (reinterpretation) of the history of Israel.

Writers were dominant by one central truth: Israel was to be a worshipping community.

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Community was to have its center in the Temple.

Authors of the Chronicler's work were not interested in David as a political leader.

By the time they wrote their narratives Israel had ceased to be a nation.

They depicted David as the ideal king and the prototype of the Messiah.

For these authors David was primarily the one who organized Israel as a worshipping community.

It was David who made Jerusalem the Holy City.

He was the one who conceived the building of the Temple according to a plan devised by God.

Writers ignored aspects of the tradition that detract from his messianic status.

From the accounts of David the writers proceed to tell the history of Israel in ecclesiastical terms.

From their viewpoint the Northern Kingdom fell because it separated itself from true worship.

Southern Kingdom eventually proved to be so corrupt that the Lord brought judgment on them.

Holy City fell and the Temple was destroyed and the priests and people were taken into exile.

At this point in history the Chronicler started the story found in Ezra-Nehemiah. Edict of Cyrus enabled the Jews to return to Jerusalem where they rebuilt the Temple. Ezra came from Babylon to initiate a great religious reform. Nehemiah also came from Babylon to supervise the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Israel came back from exile but not as a nation.

Span of 3 generations from the completion of the Temple (515 BC) to appearance of Nehemiah. Persian culture had reached its greatest height. Chronicler jumped over this period in order to go as quickly as possible to the reform of Ezra. Other sources give us information about Israel during that time. It is found mostly in the books of the minor prophets who shed light on conditions in Palestine. Important information can also be gleaned from the writings of *Third Isaiah* (Isaiah 56-66).



Book of *Obadiah* presents a clear message of judgment against the people of Edom. Prophet elaborated on earlier traditions about the *Day of the Lord*. He applied them for the sake of the Israelite community of Jerusalem and then for the exiles. He heralded the judgment of God upon the nations near Israel.

In terms of his background we do not have much information about him. He more than likely lived during the sixth century BC and had some religious training. He seemed to be familiar with the prophetic traditions of judgment against the nations. He was particularly versed in the anti-Edomite language. Parallels can be found in Jeremiah 40, Ezekiel 25:12-14, Joel and Amos. Style of his oracles suggests he had great communication and literary skills.

Edom is located to the south of the Dead Sea and is surrounded by deserts to the east and south. West of Edom is a mountainous region and to the north a stream separated Edom from Moab. Region was characterized by the reddish color of its rocks and mountains. Edomites arrived and settled in the region around 1300 BC. History of relationship between Israelites and Edomites was one of animosity and hostility. Message of Obadiah was one of judgment for Edom and one of hope for the Israelite community. After the devastation of Jerusalem in 587 BC there had to be judgment against Edom. Edom played a part in the catastrophe that befell Judah.

To balance the theological crisis Obadiah developed a theology of divine justice. God would intervene and punish those who had been involved in the plunder of Jerusalem. Destruction of Edom was announced.

Tied to the theme of the *justice of God* was the theme of the *Day of the Lord*.
Day of the Lord was linked to the idea of *holy war*.
Holy war was that God was able and willing to intervene to defeat the enemies of his people.
Day of the Lord also implied the judgment and destruction of those enemies.
Victory and salvation were for the people of God.
Destruction of Edom was not a chance event but the result of the righteous actions of God.
Message of Obadiah ended with a statement concerning the future of the people.
Vindication of the people would become a reality thanks to the intervention of God.
National borders would be restored and Mount Zion would be reestablished as the capital.

Jewish Perspective of Obadiah

Obadiah was one of the minor prophets.
Babylonian Talmud insists that Obadiah was the same man who served King Ahab and Elijah.
In 1 Kings 18 a man named Obadiah hid one hundred righteous prophets from Ahab.
In the *Legends of the Jews* Isaiah and Obadiah uttered their prophecies in 71 languages.
Some sources state that Obadiah was forced to prophesy by 71 members of Sanhedrin.

Some Jewish scholars accept the narrow nationalism of Obadiah.
He condemned Edom and other pagan nations and looked to the exaltation of Israel.
Anti-Edomite sentiment ran all the way back to when Esau and Jacob wrestled (Genesis 25).
In Numbers 20 the Edomites would not allow the Israelites to pass through their land.
In 1 Esdras 4 it was specifically the Edomites who destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.
Family of Abraham will become the saviors on Mount Zion when the Messiah finally comes.

Latter-Day Saints

Latter-Day Saints ignore the first twenty verses of *Obadiah*.
But they cling to the last verse found in this book of the Bible.
Joseph Smith and other church leaders were consistent in how they interpreted this passage.
It was both a literal scripture passage and an allegory of good versus evil.
Because of its wickedness and hatred for Israel, Edom became a symbol for the world.

Lord counseled Joseph Smith on how to interpret that last verse:
Spirit of Elijah would come and the Gospel would be established,
The Saints of God would gather.
Zion would be built up and the Saints would come as saviors on Mount Zion.
They become saviors on Mount Zion by building their temples and baptismal fonts.
They would receive all the ordinances on behalf of those that were dead.
They would redeem them so that they could go forth in the first resurrection and be exalted.
It fulfilled the mission of Elijah.

Joseph Smith (1805-1844) added:
Such a view reconciled the Scriptures of truth and justified the ways of God to the people.
It put the human family on equal footing and harmonized every principle of righteousness.

Charles W. Penrose of the Latter-Day Saints was born in London, England (1832-1925).
It was said that he learned to read the Bible by the age of four.
He was introduced to the church and baptized at the age of eighteen in London.
He met and married his wife, Lucetta Stratford, and the couple had eighteen children.

President Penrose wrote on saviors:

Latter-Day Saints are called to be saviors of all people (saviors of this world).
Saviors are to introduce to humankind what will save them.
Saviors are to bring people up from their lowest state into a condition fit to dialogue with God.
They are to plant in the minds of children the truth as they understand it.
Saviors on Mount Zion are for both the living and the dead.
Members should spend a great deal of time repenting, forgiving, and enduring.

Only the *Day of the Lord* will establish once and for all the reign of God in history.
It will break this cycle of violence and ensure Judah a future that is secure.
From Book of Mormon they teach that the Lord sometimes intervenes in human lives.
Purpose is to set us straight, redirect our purposes for a greater good, and/or rescue a lineage.
Saviors on Mount Zion refuse to pass on the destructive and toxic parenting they received.
Gives recognition to the courage of those who want to purify lineage.

Other Perspectives

Methodist reformer, John Wesley, identified the savior-deliverers with Jesus Christ.
Also included were his apostles and other preachers of the gospel (both past and present).
Hebrew word *yasha* is the root word from which the words *Jesus* and *salvation* are derived.
It denotes the saving power of God.
Saviors are those who preserve or deliver others from danger and destruction.
In Nehemiah 9:27 the saviors are judges.
Saviors can also be wise men and women of spiritual insight and faith.
Chosen instruments which go forth to teach all nations and make known the glory of God.



Malachi

Other evidence on conditions in the Jewish community is provided by the Book of *Malachi*.
It was probably written a generation or so before Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem.

At this time the Jewish community was ruled by a Persian governor. The Second Temple had been completed but the hearts of the people were no longer in their worship.

Malachi echoes the cries of Obadiah against Edom.
Many see this book of the Bible as a fitting transition to the New Testament.
In most Hebrew transcripts Malachi functions differently.

It is the *seal of the Prophets*.

In the Hebrew Bible it concludes the *Book of Twelve* and the larger unit of Prophets.

It is followed by the section called *Writings*.

As expected we find words of both judgment and salvation from God.

This time they are directed to Israel (either to the people as a whole or to the priests specifically).

But we also hear the voices of the people and the priests in response.

One of the distinctive features of the book is the on-going dialogue.

Complaint about the placement of the book is that the Old Testament ends with a whimper.

Book does not belong to the time when Israel and Judah were political powers.

It comes from the post-exilic period when Judah was reduced to a minor administrative unit.

Deliverance is in the distant future when the Lord will come to his temple.

Final eschatological scene is brief and sparse in imaginative detail.

At the same time in these four chapters are the creative reworking of the major themes.

We see a passion for justice and concern for the widow and orphan.

We also see a focus on the Temple.

Malachi introduces a new concept – the Book of Remembrance.

Promise is made that Elijah would come *before the great and terrible day of the Lord*.

Generated a wealth of legends and traditions in Judaism.

It was of importance to early Christian community.

It helped to focus and understand role of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Malachi accused the people of going through the motions of the worship rituals.

It appeared they found the whole thing boring and wearisome.

He said it would be better to close the doors of the Temple than to go on like they were.

Lord deserved nothing but the best gifts and the most sincere worship.

Even the Gentiles magnified the name of the Lord.

But Israel profaned it by inadequate and insincere worship.

Priests were not guarding the true Torah and social injustices abounded.

And the people complained that serving God did not have enough benefits.

Scholars agree that Malachi does not measure up to the other prophets.

In 3:6-12 he suggested to the people to offer a tenth of their income and Israel would be blessed.

Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

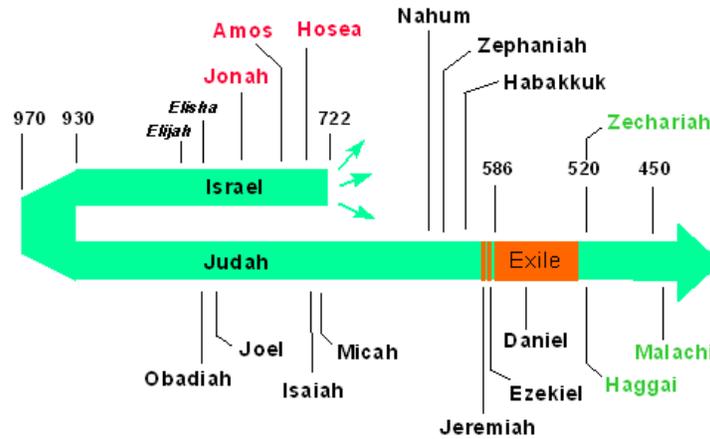


Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

Background to Hosea

Hosea is situated between 750-724 BC.

Time between the last years of Jeroboam II and three years before the fall of Israel to Assyrians.

He prophesied during a politically turbulent time after the peaceful rule of Jeroboam II.

Of the six kings to ascend to the throne all but one died violently.

Northern Kingdom contended with the Assyrian king but also clashed with Judah.

Nation was rife with economic abuses.

Social inequities between rich and poor were very much apparent.

Richer classes intensified their exploitation of the peasants in order to pay their debts.

Many resorted to fraud or cheating.

Hosea is best known for its condemnation of Israel's cult.

To understand Hosea we need to recognize that religion of Israel included Canaanite religion.

Lord was the primary God for the Israelites.

However the early Israelite religion included the worship of several other deities.

Veneration of the El, Baal, and perhaps the goddess Asherah was tolerated and accepted.

Things condemned as Baal worship in Hosea were for centuries acceptable parts of worship.

A number of factors eventually led to an evolving monotheism –

Rise of the monarchy

Increased use of writing that disseminated normative views

Growing religious self-definition in contrast to the other religions

If worship of Baal had long been part of Israelite religion then Hosea was not a reformer.

There was no hearkening the Israelites back to an uncontaminated worship of God alone.

But Hosea was a religious innovator and a spokesperson for a developing monotheistic theology.

His theological ideas would influence the later Deuteronomistic writers.

For them the belief in one God became normative.

In 721 BC the predictions of Hosea became true.
Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians under Sargon II.
Upper-class Israelites were exiled to other parts of the Assyrian Empire.
Poorer classes endured Assyrian occupation.
Fortunate ones escaped to Judah.
Scholars believe that these oracles survived because the refugees brought them to Judah.

Oracles were selected traditions vital enough to be retained.
Collector also arranged them in a particular literary order (not chronological).
All was grounded in the life of a particular person (Hosea).
Call of the prophet authenticated his ministry.

Assignment for November 11

Read Ezra and Nehemiah