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Old Testament Survey: Prophetic Books



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Introduction to the Study Guide

The following two Study Guide sections will aid you on your journey through the Old Testament prophets. The first, the study guide for preparation, has study questions on the left side of the opened guide so that you can record your personal notes from your preparation on the right.

The second section of visuals is to be used with the taped lectures and includes in the progression of the lessons some of the diagrams Mr. Hatch uses on the blackboard in the class. His style is to "build" step-by-step, and he also reviews in the same way as the basic visualization of the "chart" develops. The partial diagrams should guide you in following his, "this . . . and this . . . relate to this," etc. He eventually says clearly what "this" is and the diagram will help you at that point.

Lessons 1 and 2

DEFINITION OF A PROPHET

- A. The Nature of a Biblical Prophet: Since the prophetic books of the Old Testament are the written messages of the prophets of the Old Testament, it will help us in our understanding of these books to know something about these men. So our first project in this study will be to study the nature and ministry of a biblical prophet.
1. How is the word "prophet" used in ordinary conversation outside of the Bible? Write out a sentence using the word as it is commonly used. Now look up the word in a dictionary and note its various uses. Which one of these would you take as the definition of a biblical prophet? Copy that one down in your notes.
 2. Now we will turn to the Bible for some actual cases of biblical prophets. Study the following prophets in detail and see what they have in common. You might want to put your findings in the form of a chart. The results of this would constitute a biblical definition of a prophet.
 - a. Nathan.....2 Sam. 12:1-15
 - b. Gad.....2 Sam. 24:10-14
 - c. Elijah.....1 Kings 21:17-24
 - d. Elisha.....2 Kings 3:13-20
 - e. Azariah.....2 Chron. 15:1-8
 - f. Hanani.....2 Chron. 16:7-10
 3. Were these prophets at certain regular times or was there some special occasion which provoked the message? Mark the ones above that spoke on some special occasion and note what the occasion was.
 4. Did you notice anything in common as to the content of the message that was given? Was it always the same? If you did not do this in the study above, go back through each of the cases and note the content of each prophet. Did you notice any other outstanding characteristics true of all these cases?
 5. Based on the above study write out a summary statement of the nature of a prophet and his ministry. When you have done this, compare it with the definition you got from the dictionary. How do the two compare?

Lessons 1 and 2 Continued

6. Does your summary definition of a biblical prophet fit the following?

Abraham.....Gen. 20:7
Moses.....Deut. 34:10
Jesus.....John 4:16-19
N. T. prophets.....Acts 15:30-32;
21:8-14

Study Notes

Lesson 3

B. The Historical Background of the Prophets

1. The second step in our study of the prophets will be to get a general understanding of the times and problems the prophets had to face. What aspect of the definition of a prophet would indicate that such a study would be helpful in understanding the message of the prophet?
2. The Lord has given the material for this study in the historical books of the Old Testament. Remember the ultimate end of this study of "history" is that the Holy Spirit might give us through this a better understanding of what God spoke through the prophets. Our goal in dealing with this historical material is not just to learn the mass of historical facts, but to master the movements and patterns that give meaning to the facts. The most obvious of these patterns is that during the times of the prophets there are two lines of history and one of these is much more important than the other. In 2 Kings God follows both of these and in 2 Chronicles He goes back and underscores the more important one. What are these two lines? See 2 Kings 14:17-25. Which is the more important? See 2 Chronicles 25:25 - 26:1.
3. We will begin with the more important of the two lines of history, (2 Chron. 26-36). Our goal is not just to learn these facts, but it is impossible to see the movements of God if we do not first learn the facts. Our first step then will be to master the facts as given in 2 Chron. 26-36. Since God always uses men, God's history will center in men. On a work sheet, list the eleven important men (kings), leaving space under each one to put in additional facts later.
4. Now work carefully through the material on each of these men putting down the outstanding facts. Watch for important things like the spiritual condition, political successes or failures, appearance of outside nations.
5. Now, look through the facts you have gathered about these men and see if you can see any patterns or movements spiritually or politically.

Lesson 4

Movements in the History of Judah

1. The purpose of this study is to begin to see some of the patterns or movements--the threads that tie together and give meaning to the history. The first one will be the pattern of the spiritual condition of Judah. Make another list of the eleven kings of Judah. Now indicate for each one (by checking in 2 Chron. 26-36) his spiritual condition as high or low or in between. You might put this in the form of a graph. Do you see any pattern in this material?
2. The next pattern we want to trace is the condition of Judah politically. Go through the eleven kings again indicating on paper whether they were strong or weak politically. A graph would help you to see this. Do you see any pattern here?
3. Another pattern to be traced is that of the Gentile nations around Judah and their relations to Judah. "Thumb through" 2 Chron. 26-36 and mark down every Gentile nation that appears (26:26 being the first one). There are at least seven nations that come into the picture. When you have a list of these, locate them on one of the maps in your Bible.
4. There are two large political crises in this period of time (2 Chron. 26-36) which are very important for the prophets. What are they? Are they related in any way to the spiritual pattern in Judah? Would you say that these two crises are about equal in importance or does one stand out as more significant?
5. We step back now and see how this part of Bible "history" fits into the whole story of God's plan of redemption. This is very important. This story begins in Gen. 12. What does God begin to establish here as the channel of His salvation? Look up in a dictionary the definition of this thing God said He would make. What three things are necessary for God to give to Abraham?
6. Read the following verses to see God's promises of the first of these three things: Gen 13:16, 15:2, 22:15-19. When was this fulfilled? See Exodus, Chapter 1. Now read Gen. 13:14-15; 15:12-21; 28:10-13. When was this fulfilled? See Josh. 1:1-11; 13:1, 2; 21:43-45. For the third thing read Gen. 17:5, 6; 35:11. When was this given to God's people? See 1 Sam. 8:4-9 and 2 Sam. 5:1-5.
7. Now read carefully Deut. 28:58-68. Do you see any references to the three things we have been looking at? What does God say will happen to these if they disobey?

Lesson 5

The History of Israel (2 Kings 14:23 - Chapter 17): We will now trace the workings of God through the subordinate line of Bible history. This has to do with "Israel" or the ten tribes in the north.

1. Read through these chapters to get a list of the kings of Israel and a general impression of the nature of this line. Make a list of these kings as you did for Judah indicating for each his spiritual condition. Do you see any pattern of the spiritual life of Israel? Are they all equally bad?
2. Go back through the material for each of these kings and note the political condition of Israel under each of these kings. Do you see any political conditions here that you did not see in Judah? Did you notice any period when Israel seemed to be fairly strong?
3. What important Gentile nation is prominent in this period? Indicate on your list of kings each occasion on which this nation appears, pointing out the outstanding things that took place.
4. Try to put the two lines of Judah and Israel together. On a rough "chart" begin to work the patterns of Israel's history into the patterns of Judah's history. Do not worry now about exact dates.
5. The Prophets: When you have finished the above so that you have a rough chart, place each of the prophets on this chart in terms of the time when they ministered. You may have to wait until Lesson Six to do this. The simplest way to do this is to get a Bible handbook (like Halley's, Unger's or Angus-Green) and take the dates of each of the prophets from this book. Try to get this in terms of the reign of certain kings rather than in terms of years.

Notes

Lesson 6
The Book of Amos

Historical Background

1. Though Amos was not the earliest of the prophets, we will consider his message first since he is more intimately tied to the historical picture. Read Amos 1:1. When did Amos minister? To whom did he minister?
2. What were the political conditions during the time of Amos' ministry? Note 2 Kings 14:23-29, especially verses 25 and 29. Israel had been under the oppression of Syria. How do they fare now? See 2 Kings 13:22-25. What about Israel's military status with respect to Judah? (2 Kings 14:8-14.) Since Assyria is out of the picture at this time, how would you summarize Israel's political position under Jeroboam?
3. What is the material or financial condition of Israel during the time of Amos? Read Amos 3:12, 15; 6:4. What does this suggest?
4. How were things spiritually when Amos ministered? Had Israel turned to idols--or what was the situation? Read Amos 2:8; 5:21-24; 8:4-5.
5. Can you summarize the condition of Israel under Jeroboam to which Amos spoke?
6. What can you gather about Amos as a man? (See 1:1 and 7:14-17). Where did he live? Was he a native of Israel? Was Israel on good terms with his native land? Give a modern-day parallel to this call that God gave to Amos.
7. In what particular place does Amos minister? Note Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5; 7:10-13. What happened there under Jeroboam I? (1 Kings 12:25-29). Was Amos a city boy? Note his call in Amos 7:14-15.

The Book as a Whole

8. Read through the book of Amos hurriedly to get a bird's-eye view of the content. Into what three parts does the book fall? Give a title to each of these sections (on the basis of your brief survey).
9. The last of these sections is different in form from the other sections. What is this difference? The first part of each of the following verses suggests this peculiarity: 7:1; 7:4; 7:7; 8:1; 9:1.
10. What would you say is the central message of Amos (keep in mind the situation in Israel)? Read 3:14; 15; 5:27; 6:14; 9:4; 9:8, 9. What theme do these verses suggest? What verse in chapter one would be good key-text for this theme?

Lesson 7
Amos

Amos Chapters 1-2: Read these two chapters for detail study.

1. What does the expression, "for three transgressions of _____, yea, for four....," mean? Do you think there were three or four specific sins? Look this up in some commentary if you are not clear on it.
2. Make a list of the nations mentioned here; then look at a map of this area. Is there any special order that Amos is following? Why does he follow this order? (Remember who Amos is and where he is.)
3. Make a list of the sins condemned for each nation. Is each nation charged with the same kind of sin? What two or three large kinds of sins do you see here?
4. Notice the judgment pronounced on each nation. What figure of speech is used to represent judgment?

Amos Chapters 3-6

5. Read through these chapters quickly to get a clearer understanding of the theme of the section. Note the key word that has been given that indicates this theme. You will see it, for example, in 3:2; 3:11; 5:27, etc.
6. The main thing we want to get from our study of this section is to see those things which are displeasing to God whether in Israel or in us. Now work carefully through these chapters paragraph by paragraph listing every specific thing with which God is displeased. For example, what is there in 3:2 that provokes God's anger? What is there in v. 10? Be sure to notice the list of five similar things in 4:6-11.
7. When you have completed this list of sins in Israel, work through them and show how each could apply to a Christian today. For example, what would God say to me in relationship to my church or Christian community if He applied 3:2 to me?
8. Though it is not the main theme of this section, Amos gives a lot here about the nature of the coming judgment. Go through these chapters again and note the passages that tell the nature of this judgment. The first of these is 3:11-12. When you have identified three or four such passages, read through them again and jot down what each tells about the judgment. Notice that the descriptions become more specific as you go down through the chapters.

Lesson 8

Amos Chapters 7-9

1. Read through these chapters to get a general idea of the content. Be sure to locate the five visions. These are introduced by the phrase, "Jehovah showed me." This is comparable to the phrase "I saw...." used by most prophets in giving a vision.
2. The first three visions(7:1-9) seem to go together. Read through these again and give a title to each one. What is the instrument of judgment in the first vision? What is it in the second? Did these actually take place (remember these are visions)? What intervened? What does this teach us about God's judgment? Did the third vision take place? Be sure you understand what a "plumbline" is and what it represents here.
3. The fourth vision (8:1-3) is a very simple one. Read it and give a title to it. What does Amos see? It will help you to understand this symbol to know that to them "summer fruit" was the last or "end" fruit. What is the message of this vision?
4. The rest of chapter 8 (8:4-14) is a discourse on the sin of Israel and the judgment that must come. What sins do you see in vs. 4-6? What kind of judgment is predicted in vs. 7-10? Notice the unusual kind of judgment that is promised in vs. 11-14.
5. The fifth vision is given in 9:1-4. Where does this judgment take place? What is the main thought in vs. 2-4? What distinction in the judgment do you see in vs. 7-10?
6. The closing paragraph of Amos is very important (9:11-15). Read this carefully. Does this deal with judgment? What is the section about generally? What does the phrase "in that day" suggest? What five things are promised for that day?

Study Question Notes

Lesson 8 Continued
HOSEA

The Historical Background

1. Read Hosea 1:1 to get the location of the ministry of Hosea. Do the kings of Judah coincide with the ones given for Israel? Did Hosea minister beyond the reign of Jeroboam? Why do you think Hosea made this difference in the listing of kings?
2. The first part of the ministry of Hosea falls under the time of Jeroboam, and thus he faced some of the same conditions that were before Amos. Read chapters 1-3 and jot down any references to these conditions.
3. Read Hosea 4:1-5. Does this seem to reveal the same conditions as were prevalent under Jeroboam? Read 2 Kings 15:8-31 for the internal political conditions. How does this compare with that under Jeroboam? What do the following verses in Hosea suggest about Israel's "foreign" affairs? 5:13; 7:11, 16; 8:8-10; 11:5; 12:1.
4. If Amos faced the "sins of the city", what does Hosea face? See such passages as 4:1-5; 6:8-10; 7:1-7.
5. What would you think the material conditions would be? What does 2 Kings 15:19 suggest? How do the conditions already observed in Israel affect the economy of a nation?
6. What is the religious condition facing Hosea as compared with that of Amos? Note these passages: 2:8, 11, 17; 4:11-19; 8:11-14; 13:1-3.

Hosea: The Man

7. All that is known about Hosea is what one gets from his book. Read chapters 1-3 and jot down any facts you can find about him. Where did he live? What hint is given in 7:5? Where does he minister?

Study Question Notes

Lesson 9

HOSEA

Hosea: The book as a whole:

1. There is not very much logical structure to the book of Hosea. One writer has said, "No book is so obscure in outline as Hosea." It has been called a "series of sobs," emotional rather than logical. Into what two rough divisions does it fall?
2. What is the theme of the book? Read the following verses: 1:2; 4:1,2; 4:8; 6:8,9; 11:12; 13:12. Do you see the clear emphasis of these verses? Now read the following and note the contrast: 3:1; 11:8; 14:1,4. What is this emphasis?

Chapters 1-7

3. Read these chapters through to get the facts about Hosea's experience. What are the four phases of this experience? Do you think this actually happened to Hosea? If so, how could God make such a request of a man? Is there a parallel between Hosea's experience and that of Israel?
4. What were the names of the three children? What do they each mean? What is the significance of Jezreel? (1:4,5,11; 2:22) See 2 Kings 10:1-11. How does chapter one close? 1:10--2:1.
5. What happens to Hosea's wife in chapter 2? What is the parallel in Israel? How does this chapter close? (2:14-23)
6. What happens in chapter 3? What is the parallel with Israel? How does the chapter end (3:4-5)? What two facts are given about the future of God's people? What do the three chapters have in common? Note the end of the second section. (14:4).
7. What was the value of this experience of Hosea? For Hosea? For Israel? For us? Does this experience fit in with the theme of the book? Is there always a relationship between the nature and experience of the prophet and the message that God gives him? How about Amos?
8. Read through these chapters hurriedly, looking for the general picture of moral decay, some of the causes for it and the judgment upon it. List the striking phrases that describe the moral decay, (such as "feed upon the sin of my people," "Ephraim is joined to his idols," "robbers ravaged without.")

(Lesson 9 continued)

9. Chapter 4 seems to stand as a unit (compare 4:1 and 5:1). What does verse one suggest as the general nature of the chapter? Note the accusation (vs. 1 and 2) and the judgment (vs. 3). What do verses 4 and 5 mean? He seems to be shifting the blame from the people--to whom? Verses 5-10 elaborate on these who are to blame. Who are they? What have they done?
10. What specific sin is primary in 4:11-19? What is prominent in these verses that is closely related to the theme of Hosea?
11. To what two groups is chapter 5 addressed? What does 1-7 accuse Israel of doing? What does 8-14 accuse them of doing?
12. What is peculiar about 6:1-3? Who is talking? Who has been talking? Could there be any relationship between 6:1 and 5:15?
13. Does 6:4-10 indicate much hope for returning? Note 7:1-2 also. What is the primary accusation in 6:4-11?
14. Who is accused in 7:3-7? What is the meaning of the figure of the oven? (Vs. 4-7)
15. What aspect of the life of the people is dealt with in 7:8-16? Note especially verses 8-9, 11, 14, 16.

Study Questions Notes

Lesson 10

Hosea: Chapters 8-10

1. Read through these chapters looking for the picture that is presented of political decay. Jot down phrases or verses that speak of this.
2. This idea of the political condition seems to begin in 7:8-16. Read this section again with this in mind. What two striking figures does he use? Give the meaning of each one. What is the great accusation in this section?
3. Of what two parallel follies is Israel accused in the first part of chapter 8? The results of these follies is given in the latter part of the chapter. Of which one does he speak in verses 8-10? Of which one in 11-14?
4. Read 9:1-9 underscoring every use of the future tense of the verb. Hosea is giving a detailed picture of the future. What is he describing? Make a list of the things that will be true in that day.
5. In 9:10-17, Hosea turns to Israel's past. How did she begin? Then what happened? What is this accusation? What is the resulting judgment mentioned several times in this section?
6. In chapter 10 Hosea returns to Israel's double sin. What are they? Notice how they are presented in vs. 1-3. Judgment is described in vs. 4-8. What is the meaning of the figure in vs. 11? Notice how this figure runs on through vs. 12-15. What is to be the end of Israel politically?

Hosea: Chapter 11-14

7. What aspect of Israel's life does Hosea take up in 11:1-4? (Compare 9:10; 10:9; 12:3; 13:4) List what God has done for Israel. What is the meaning of the figure in verse 4?
8. The rest of chapter 11 contains what has been called the greatest passage in the book. Notice the abrupt change of subject in vs. 5. What is the new subject? Verses 8-11 is the climax. Read it and try to feel with Hosea and Jehovah. What are Admah and Zeboim? (See Gen. 10:19; 14:8; 19:24, 25). Would you find in your own heart any emotional difficulty in condemning such a wicked nation as Israel?
9. In 11:12-12:14, Hosea begins his final argument. What is the accusation brought against Israel in the first part? What does "Ephraim feedeth on wind" mean? Of what are they reminded in verses 2-6? Note additional accusations and judgments in vs. 7-14.

(Lesson 10 continued)

10. Chapter 13 gives the final picture of judgment. As you read through this chapter, notice the various figures used to describe this judgment. Be sure to interpret each of these.
11. Chapter 13 also returns to some old themes by way of summary. What references are there to the past? What about idolatry? What about the failure of the leaders? What about people turning from Jehovah?
12. Chapter 14 opens with Hosea's final plea for Israel to return. Try to get the feeling of his plea, what definite argument is presented to urge their return?
13. How does the book end? (vs. 4-9). How does vs. 4 fit into the theme of the book Hosea? What is the figure used in describing what Jehovah will do? Notice how the figure is carried through in describing the blessings of Israel. List the specific blessings promised.

Study Question Notes

Lesson 11
ISAIAH

Historical background: (2 Chron. 26-32; 2 Kings 15-20)

1. Read Isaiah 1:1 in the light of Amos 1:1 and Hosea 1:1. What are the two differences between Isaiah 1:1 and Amos 1:1 as to the historical situation? How is Isaiah 1:1 like Hosea 1:1? How is it different? Be sure that you have Isaiah rightly placed on your chart in relation to these kings and the other two prophets.
2. Where does Isaiah stand in relation to the Babylonian Captivity? Be sure you can locate the beginning and the end of Isaiah's ministry in terms of the number of the years before this important event.
3. Looking at your chart, into what three periods would you divide the period covered by the ministry of Isaiah? What would characterize each period politically and spiritually?
4. Apparently not much of Isaiah was written during the first of the three periods. Read 2 Chron. 26:6-15 as suggestive of this period. What would you expect Isaiah to deal with at this time? Would it be like Amos or Hosea? (Note Is. 3:13-24.)
5. Read 2 Chron. 28 for a picture of the second period. What is the situation now? Note Is. 7:1-9 in this connection.
6. The bulk of Isaiah seems to have been written during the third period. Read 2 Chron. 29-32. What two great events are described here? (See 2 Kings 18-19 for a fuller description of the second event.) Become as familiar as possible with the facts of this period. Try to recount them to yourself or to someone else.
7. What three important political crises came during the ministry of Isaiah?
(Two to Judah, one to Israel.)

Study Question Notes

Lesson 12

Isaiah: The man

1. What was Isaiah by background and training? (cf. Amos 7:14). Read Is. 6:1; 7:3; 37:1-3, 5, 21; 38:1; 39:3-6. What do these passages suggest about him? How does Isaiah compare with Amos and Hosea at this point?
2. Not much is given about the personal life of Isaiah. Note Is. 6; 7:3; 8:1-4. What facts are given here?
3. Isaiah has been called "the Paul of the Old Testament". List any similarities you see now between the two.

The Book as a Whole

4. Because of the size of the book, it is very difficult to get a quick view of the whole book. Do not refer to outside helps for the structure of the book: try to see it for yourself.
5. "Thumb through" the book of Isaiah, glancing at each chapter to get a general idea of the nature of its contents. DO NOT try to read each verse, but perhaps the few opening verses as suggestive of the chapter's contents. When you come to a group of chapters which are clearly different from the preceding indicate this in your notebook.
6. Did you find a group of chapters toward the middle of the book which were radically different from the preceding and following chapters? Why were these chapters put into the book? Is the part of Isaiah that follows this central section any different from the part that precedes it?
7. Can you see three large groups of chapters in the first section of Isaiah (the part that goes before the unique central section referred to above)?

Study Question Notes