

MESSAGE FROM PROPHETS

(Old Testament Prophets – A Study)

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Divyabodhanam Books Series 13

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Statement

Dear ones,

By God's abundant grace, the first stage of Divyabodhanam program has concluded successfully. The preparation of ten books on our faith related topics itself is a good achievement.

The program that commenced only in 1984 had 49 centres associated with it. There were 130 women and 210 men who participated in this exercise. His Holiness Catholicose is distributing certificates on August 9, 1986 to those who have completed the course (10 subjects).

Now, we are coming to the second stage. Apart from accepting participants for the second batch of the preliminary stage, new courses are being formulated for those who have completed first stage.

The target for the second stage too is to deepen the knowledge of church members in their understanding of faith. This would be useful equally for parents and youth possessing basic education. This process is a basic requirement for all Sunday school teachers.

What is being looked forward to is ten thousands of members completing this course within the next few years resulting in an all-round progress in the faith centered life of our people. Let these books be instrumental in Holy Spirit to experience the love of God that is expressed with the God coming down as a human in Christ. Let there be showering of Blessings from the Almighty to all of you.

Kottayam,

July 2, 1986

Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso, President, Divyabodhanam

From the Editor's Desk

PREFACE

Prophets revealed God in part, and the Son revealed God fully. We can understand Christ only in the background of Old Testament prophesies. As such, it is necessary for us to understand Old Testament prophets and their exhortations in its correct concepts. This book, 'Message from Prophets' is a humble attempt in this direction.

In 24 lessons, Prophets namely Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi are briefly dealt with. The prophets are presented chronologically. However, there are differences of opinion among scholars about the life period of prophets. Due to limitations of detailed knowledge as well as intended length of this book, it has not been possible to cover all aspects in their entirety.

Prophets are called to convey messages to the people from God as and when needed (Hebrews 1:1). Despite tribulations and personal losses, they had stood firm to their tasks and carried out their responsibilities with commitment. Everyone was very conscious to raise the voice of repentance so that the people of God who went wayward by breaking the covenant were received back by God. Holiness and righteousness were pointed out as two aspects of repentance. They taught about love of God through a life in worship and about loving men through good deeds. Recalling historical events, they convinced people of their God who interfered in history for their sake and redeeming them through punishments. They highlighted the role of sufferings in a life with God and their share in the glory of God for those who accepted sufferings. Likewise, all of us should be able to get inspired by these prophets who were conveying messages of great value and be partners in the glory of God.

Let me express my sincere thanks to my dear and respected preceptor Rev Dn Dr K A George for providing me the necessary guidelines during the writing of 'Message from Prophets'. Indeed, this stands as a book now largely because of the help and cooperation of Fr Dr T J Joshua. Achen had taken a good lot of pain to read the manuscript fully and suggest corrections in content and language. I owe a lot to Joshua Achen and offer my most sincere thanks. Also, I am indebted to all of those who are associated with Divyabodhanam programme for their continuous encouragement. Let me express my sincere thanks to each one of them.

Above all, let the name of our omnipotent God be glorified for making this possible. Let me pray to the Almighty that the readers and those who participate in the Divyabodhanam programme get inspired from the messages of these prophets and be partners in the glory of God. With this prayer and hope, let me present this humble work before the readers.

Fr V M James

Kollam, Mayaltho

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Unit 1

An Introduction to Messages from Prophets

Lesson 1

Prophets and Prophecies

Prophets # Prophetic Guild # The Term Prophet # Call of Prophet # Prophecy in Israel and neighbouring Cultures

God crowned man with glory and honour (Psalm 8:5); God created human beings making them to be like Himself (Genesis 1:27); Consequent to the satanic influence of those angels fallen in arrogance (Isaiah 4:12 – 15) and the selfish misuse of God given free will, man distanced him from God and his likeness to God declined. Men who were distanced from God got distanced among themselves too. God chose Israel as a separate community to renew the relation between man and God and reconcile men among themselves as also to be light for all people and a model to all; they were chosen to sustain in relationship with God and out of the grace so received to grow into glory of God in holiness and goodness. They were led through the right path by fathers, prophets and people of knowledge.

Prophets:

In the history of Jewish religion, the position of prophets is of high esteem. God's glory was revealed to this world mainly by the prophets before the incarnation of Logos, the Son of God. "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son" (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

It was the prophets who revealed the will of God to the Jews who got detached from true God and lived a life of declination socially and religiously; they worked to turn the people back to God. Prophetic books were penned after the 8th century BC, but there were people who possessed the gift of prophecy. Abraham (Genesis 20:7), Moses (Deuteronomy 34:12; Hosea 12:13), Aaron (Exodus 7:1), Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2), Gad (2 Samuel 24:11), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29) are all examples for those who had the gift of prophecy. Further, Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Deborah (Judges 4:4) were prophetesses. Three main prophets during the days of Kings were Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. Though prophetic texts were not written, Ahijah (1 Kings 14:18) and Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8) worked hard to establish a divinity in political, social and religious matters. Prophetic system assumed importance among Hebrews during the reign of kings. Probably, the role of Samuel in choosing and anointing Saul as the first king of Israel would have been reason for the sustenance and encouragement to this prophetic system.

Prophetic Guild:

We read about a group of seventy prophets during the time of Moses in the tent much before prophetic communities were identified as a system (Numbers 11: 24 – 26). During the time of Samuel, there was a substantial increase in the number of prophets. It was then that prophets started staying together with their disciples as we read in certain texts. They were treated as a prophetic guild and were provided training by Samuel. Such systems were there during the time of Prophet Elisha too. Such communities were there at Ramah (1 Samuel 19:19), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5) and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). Normally, prophets were addressed as master (2 Kings 2: 3, 5) or teacher (1 Samuel 10:12) and the members of the guild as prophetic disciples (2 Kings 2: 3, 5). They were mainly engaged in learning and exhorting. However, during later days, treating this as a career line, many joined the guild as a means for livelihood which gradually resulted in the decline of the system. It is in this background, the priest Amaziah directs Amos, "That is enough prophet! Go on back to Judah and do your preaching there; let them pay you for it" (Amos 7:12). Amos responded to this that he was not one who had chosen prophetic service as a means of livelihood. "I am not the kind of prophet who prophesies for pay. I am a herdsman, and I take care of fig trees" (Amos 7:14). In palaces, there were false prophets who used to give false prophecies to please the kings and others in power. These people discarded true God and got engaged in idol worship and encouraged it. It was against these types of people Prophet Elijah had a tussle and made them surrender atop Mount Carmel where he established Jehovah as the true living God (1 Kings 18: 19 – 40).

The Term Prophet:

The Hebrews used four terms to denote prophets as (1) Naabi (2) Roye (3) Hosae (4) eash elohim. The Hebrew equivalent of prophet is seen in the Old Testament on 300 plus occasions. The literal meaning of the Hebrew tern Naabi is prophet. The Syriac equivalent is Nbiyo. Prior to the use of Naabi, in the sense visionary (1 Samuel 9:9), Roye and Hosae were used intermittently (2 Samuel 24:11; 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 29:10; 30: 9, 10; Micah 3:7; Amos 7: 12 – 14). About Elijah and Elisha, the term eash elohim was used which carry a meaning 'God man '. 'God man' means one who possesses the Spirit of God (1 Samuel 9:9; Amos 7:12 – 14). Reading this, the terms Roye, Hosae and Naabi would appear synonyms, but scholars who studied these terminologies at depth have concluded that they are not synonyms. On studying the roots of these terms, it is inferred that Roye means subjective vision and Hosae means divine sight. Naabi used to be used to mean those who are inspired by the Spirit of God and proclaimed the Word of God.

The term Naabi is related to the root meaning 'to call' or 'to announce' in the Acadian and Arabic languages. Again, Naabi is used as one who proclaims the word (1 Kings 22: 8, 18) and repeatedly exhorting aloud (1 Kings 18:29). Aaron is addressed as the prophet of Moses (Exodus 4:16; 16:7). Responsibility of a prophet is to convey the word of God (1 Kings 21:17; Amos 7:15; Isaiah 6: 8, 9; 40:1). The Old Testament prophets as representatives of God understood the will of God and followed His suggestions, thoughts and exhortations which were conveyed to leaders of the community as also to the common men; they lived realising that they were called for such a service.

Call of Prophet:

A prophet becomes a true prophet not with his talent or work, but because he is chosen and called by God. He is caught by God such that there is no way to avoid it. Here, it worth noting what Amos is saying, "When a lion roars, who can avoid being afraid? When the Sovereign Lord speaks, who can avoid proclaiming his message?" (Amos 4:8). Amos has spoken to the priest Amaziah, "I am not the kind of a prophet who prophecies for pay; I am a herdsman, and I take care of fig trees. But the Lord took me from my work as a shepherd and ordered me to come and prophesy to his people Israel" (Amos 7: 14, 15).

Isaiah responded to the call, "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?" (Isaiah 6:8) and proceeded to work for God. Jeremiah says, "But when I say, I will forget the Lord and no longer speak in his name, then your message is like a fire burning deep within me" (Jeremiah 20:9). All these verses quoted above reveal the conviction of prophets about their call. Generally, all prophets start with 'the Lord told me'. The forcing power from God kept on pushing them for their prophetic tasks. This made them strengthened to suffer ridicule and persecution as they proceed with their tasks. The words of Jeremiah is an example for this "Lord, you have deceived me and I was deceived. You are stronger than I am, and you have overpowered me. Everyone jeers at me; they mock me all day long. Whenever I speak, I have to cry out and shout, "Violence, Destruction", Lord, I am ridiculed and scorned all the time because I proclaim your message" (Jeremiah 20: 7, 8).

There were many prophets who had tried to shy away from their call. They feared the oppositions likely to be confronted. Isaiah was terribly afraid at his vision of heaven (Isaiah 6:5). Jeremiah tried to avoid his call saying that he was too young and didn't know how to talk (Jeremiah 1:6). Prophets felt the hand of Jehovah too heavy (Jeremiah 15:17; Ezekiel 1:3; 8:1). Jonah went to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh as commanded (Jonah 1:1 ff). But he repented because of the denial (Jonah ch. 2). But all these prophets, though tried to avoid the call came back strongly and prophesied with uncompromising vigour and acted faithfully. The reason is that "no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

Prophecy in Israel and in Neighbouring Cultures:

We see that prophecies are not exclusive for ancient Israel; Old Testament texts and other records excavated in archaeological explorations indicate prophecies in those cultures in and around Israel. We read in the Book of Numbers (24:2 ff) about Balaam, son of Beor of Moab receiving visions and revelations through the Spirit of God. King Ahab and his wife Isabel is seen to have protected a group of prophets who acted for Baal, a Canaanite god (1 Kings 18:19). Isaiah has recorded (2:6) about a group of prophets among the Philistines.

After 1933, archaeological excavators unearthed 20,000 odd plates from the ancient library of the king of ancient city of Mari located on the borders of Iraq, close to river Euphrates. Detailed scientific researches confirmed that they are about 3700 years old (of about 1700 BC). Most of them are about prophecies. Of them, five are in the form of messages addressed to the king by a prophet. A prophet receives divine vision and revelations when he has been prostrating before the presence of God. After receiving such visions, the prophet is seen to perform a sacrifice. This record throws light on the sacrifices being offered by the prophets of Israel as mentioned in the Old Testament texts.

We are familiar with the sacrifices offered by Samuel (1 Samuel 9:14 ff) and Elijah along with those prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18: 20 – 40).

1 Samuel 10: 9 – 13 provides us information on certain people prophesying out of inspiration from music leading to ecstasy. Prophet Ezekiel has mentioned about the experience weariness prior to prophesying.

This sort of ecstatic prophesying has been very much alive not only in ancient Israel and neighbouring cultures, but even in India also to a large extent. However, in later days, ecstatic experiences turned out to be not so an important facet of Hebrew prophecies.

Peculiarities of prophecies of Israel:

Prophets of Israel did not give much importance to ecstasy or visions. But they were inspired in Spirit. They upheld values of ethics based on Hebrew culture and rituals of faith. For this, they had suffered a lot; they went through tribulations and losses. But they performed with the conviction that they were called by God for a purpose. They evaluated contemporary incidents and life experiences in relation to their divine insights.

Questions:

1. What are the peculiarities of Hebrew prophecy?
2. How can we affirm for sure the biblical thoughts that there existed a system of prophecies?

Lesson 2

Prophetic History of Israel

Prophetic History # Prophetic Texts and their Divisions (a) Oral and written Prophets (b) Former Prophets and Later Prophets [canonical Prophets] (c) Major Prophets and Minor Prophets

Everything within the limitations of time and space has a history. Though we may know this history to a good extent, unexplored part of history would be much more. In a sense, studying history happens to be a going back to the past, evaluation thereof and based on that, having a control over the future. The prophesying system of Israel too has a history of its own.

Prophetic History:

The later day writings of Israel have presented many Hebrew leaders as prophets. The term prophet was not used by the contemporaries. Based on the recognition the system of prophets received during later days, many of the Old Testament leaders came to be known as prophets, say scholars. There are four traditional sources believed to be behind the Pentateuch, of which the 'E' (or Elohist) source gives importance to prophetic thoughts as pointed out by scholars who have studied these matters at depth. Based on 'E' source, Abraham is a prophet. Behind this, the thinking is that the prayer of a prophet is fruitful (Genesis 20:7; Amos 7:2, 5). Moses who liberated Israelites from Egyptian slavery is also pictured as a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Hosea 12:13).

Prophetic Guilds came up by the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 19:19). Prophetic system assumed importance in Israel along with the kingly reigns. It was Prophet Samuel who chose and anointed the first and second kings of Israel namely Saul and David as per the will of God (1 Samuel 10:1; 12:1; 16:13). Again, it was Samuel who as commanded by God removed Saul from the position sovereignty (1 Samuel 15:23). Prophet Nathan played a crucial role in counselling David regarding anointing Solomon as his successor (1 Kings 1:11 – 39).

During the rule of kings, prophets played significant roles and had good positions in the palace. A prophet had roles in matters regarding worship (1 Kings 18:30; 2 Kings 4:23; 2 Chronicles 11: 2 -4; 2 Samuel 7; 24:18) and also in administrative consultations (1 Kings 22: 7, 8). However, there were quite a good number of false prophets who exploited such positions (1 Kings 18:19). For favours from the king and for selfish gains, they came up with false prophecies; but true prophets prophesied only the truth thereby revealing the will of God, not bothered about the king's face. Prophet Nathan had no hesitation to point out the mistakes of King David on his face (2 Samuel 12:7). In Prophet Elijah too, we see such courage (1 Kings 21:19)

Prophets like Amos and others have openly criticized the fallacy of Jewish worships and sacrificial rituals in very strong language (Amos 5: 21 – 24; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 7: 10 – 15; 58: 1 – 7; Micah 6: 6 – 8; Jeremiah 6:20; 7: 21 – 23). Those who have been engaging in violence, discarding justice and side tracking righteousness are dishonouring God. Their worship is senseless. God hates such worships. In other words, exhibition of piety and acts of immorality do not move together. Piety should get associated with morality and the prophets exhorted strongly that God would listen only to such worships and sacrifices.

Prophets of the 8th century (BC) have proclaimed that the people of Israel who have drifted away from their God who has been their creator, protector and redeemer would be punished for their evil deeds. They have proclaimed punishment of God to the authorities as also to the wealthy for having exploited the marginalized, poor and lower category subjects. After the punishment, there would be a faithful balance among the people who would be taken care and would be comforted (Isaiah 1:24 – 27). The rule of kings came to an end with the invasion by Babylonians. The Holy City of Jerusalem and the Temple of God were destroyed. Many of the people have been taken to Babylon as slaves. Thus, the warnings of prophets have turned realistic and people have been disappointed. But the prophets conveyed them messages of hope and freedom and instilled confidence and courage in them (Isaiah 40:1, 27; 43: 25 – 44: 5).

Those who have been in exile returned in BC 538 and the Temple got reconstructed with initiatives of prophets. They exhorted the people to follow Mosaic Laws and be sincere to religious acts and deeds. Prophets before the period of exile used to blame performance of ritualistic deeds without understanding the sense in them; the prophets after the days of exile encouraged the people to participate in the religious rituals meaningfully and also to be keen to be committed to morality (Isaiah 58: 6, 7). During these days, there were prophecies that those who destroyed the people of God would be punished (Isaiah 63: 1 -6) and that the Gentiles would turn towards true God (Zachariah 2:11).

With the prophecies of Malachi (BC 460 – 450), Jews felt that the prophesying system has come to its end as recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees 4:46 and 9:27. Malachi has prophesied that Prophet Elijah would appear before the occurrence of great and alarming day of Jehovah (4:5). This hope is

seen in the Book of Bar Aazera [Ben Sira] (48:10) also. Again, the Qumran community also expected the same to happen. They believed that a prophet equal to Moses would rise during the last days (Deuteronomy 18:15). Christians see Elijah in John, the Baptist (Matthew 11: 10 – 14) and the prophet of last days (Acts 3: 22 – 26) in Christ.

In New Testament too, there are references of prophets and prophecies. Such prophets were prophesying and conveying messages under inspiration of Spirit. We read in the Book of Acts that when Claudius was the emperor, Agabus, a prophet predicted that a severe famine was to come over all the earth (Acts 11:27, 28; 21: 10, 11). New Testament prophecies are mainly meaning the spiritual growth of the Church. Foreseeing the exploitations of false projects, Apostles discouraged prophecies predicting future events through visions. The gift of prophecy is not impossible even this day. But, 'love' being the noblest of all gifts of Holy Spirit, all other gifts are fulfilled in love (1 Cor. 13). As such, New Testament fathers taught everybody to be prophets of love. Christ and his Apostles had already warned to be careful about false prophets (Matthew 24:24; 2 Peter 2:1 – 19; 1 John 4:1).

Prophetic Texts and their Divisions:

Oral and written Prophets:

Prophecies were not recorded in early days. Those prophets who had not recorded their prophecies were called oral prophets and those who recorded what they prophesied were called written prophets.

Former Prophets and Later Prophets [Canonical Prophets]:

Normally, we call the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and the like as prophetic books; however, the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings are also prophetic books according to Jewish canon.

Jews believe that the books from Joshua to 2 Kings were written by prophets who are called Former Prophets. Traditions of Jews say that the book of Joshua is written by Joshua and the books of Judges and 1 & 2 Samuel by Samuel. 1 & 2 Kings is believed to be written by Jeremiah. Syrian tradition is in agreement with Jewish tradition on these issues.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and the like are called Later Prophets. Later prophecies were written in four scrolls. Among these, the first scroll contains the prophecy of Isaiah, the second one of Jeremiah and the third one contains that of Ezekiel. In the fourth scroll, 12 books are written namely those of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi. Later prophets are also called Canonical prophets.

Major Prophets and Minor Prophets:

Canonical prophets are classified into two namely Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. This classification is based exclusively on the size of the respective books. Prophecies recorded on the first, second and third scrolls are those of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who are called Major Prophets whereas those twelve prophecies recorded on the fourth scroll are of Hosea to Malachi who are the Minor Prophets. But such a classification doesn't carry much sense once we analyse the

contents. For example, Amos and Hosea are the founders of prophetic system. Looking into the core thoughts contained in these prophecies, it can be understood on a close study that Isaiah is indebted to Amos and Jeremiah to Hosea. This enables us to realise the Major mission of Minor Prophets.

Daniel and Lamentations are not considered prophecies, but included in 'letters' (Kithubim).

Questions:

1. Give a brief summary of the prophetic history of Israel.
2. How are the prophetic books classified?

Lesson 3

Prophetic Positions and Responsibilities

Mediator # Intercessor of Israel # Man of God # Member of God's Council # Servant of God # God's Messenger # Ambassador of God # Herald of God # Interpreter of Laws # Social Reformer

Any position has its responsibilities too; being a prophet, there certain responsibilities attached to it. We read in the Old Testament about the various tasks taken care of by prophets. Close examination of these helps us to understand the various aspects of the responsibilities of a prophet.

Mediator:

A prophet is called to work between man and God. Moses is a prophet in this context (Numbers 12: 6 – 8). God gave Moses the position of being a mediator between man and God when he was called to liberate the people of Israel from the Egyptians. God was with Moses (Exodus 3:12). He earned the name as the only prophet to have spoken to God face to face (Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:12). He is also called the 'First among Prophets'. God commanded that prophets like Moses would be sent again to reveal the will of God (Deuteronomy 18: 15 – 19). A prophet is expected to sustain the people in a continuous relationship and union with God. This is related to the divine revelation Moses had atop Mount Horeb. Moses is seen as the mediator, as the keeper of law and as the interpreter of Law between God and His people (Deuteronomy 5:27). All the true prophets carried out these responsibilities with total commitment.

Intercessor of Israel:

Right from the early history of Hebrews, the intercessory tasks of a prophet were understood. We read Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18: 16 – 33); we read Abraham as a prophet interceding for the life of Abimelech (Genesis 20:7). We read about such intercessions in the prophetic life of Samuel also (1 Samuel 7:5; 12: 19, 23). Prophet Elisha is seen to intercede for the deceased son of that woman of Shunem and bringing him back to life (2 Kings 4: 8 – 37). Even now, the intercession of saints is really fruitful. Their holy relics too carry power as we understand from the incident when a dead body is resurrected to life on touching the mortal remains of Prophet

Elisha in his grave (2 Kings 13: 20 – 21). However, the tendency to exploit prayers of intercession as a source for income generation needs to be condemned. At the same time, the importance of intercession through saints should never be forgotten. In these contexts, our own prophetic responsibilities should make us enthusiastic.

Man of God:

This is a position that brings forth the intimate relation between God and a prophet. The responsibility of a prophet holding this position is to lead a life in God and live in that divine power and engagement. This is clarified in the words of Amos. “The Sovereign Lord never does anything without revealing his plan to His servants, the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Through their life, prophets show that the basis of nearness to God is the holiness in our life (Exodus 19: 10 – 25). Holiness is also the ethical foundation of prophetic duties. Spirituality and the mystery of prophesying are the very same. Prophetic tasks and piety go hand in hand. Prophet Nathan prophesied against David (2 Samuel 12:7) and also against Ahab and Isabella (1 Kings 18:18; 21: 21 – 23). The prophets could courageously carry out their tasks like these because they were all living as men of God (2 Kings 4:7, 9, 21, 22, and 27).

Member of God’s Council:

Prophets are given membership to God’s council and being members of this council, the intimacy between God and His prophets are revealed (Jeremiah 23:21, 22). God reveals His mysteries to those who reach God’s presence through holiness and standing close to the saints (Amos 3:7). Prophets proclaim these mysterious revelations. The true position of prophets and the responsibilities thereof were revealed to Jeremiah through a message about the rotten prophets of Israel (Jeremiah 23: 18, 22). God reveals his mind to His dear ones who live in holiness and humility. They proclaim them and act accordingly. All those true prophets have been in line with these.

Servant of God:

From God’s angle all prophets are servants of God. The prophets earned this name because of their faithfulness and piety to God. This term have been used to address prophets very often (1 Kings 14:18; 18:36; 2 Kings 9:7; 14:25; Isaiah 20:3; Jeremiah 7:25; Amos 3:7). This position indicates service of God in its essence. It is Isaiah II who highlights this thought. Isaiah II could correlate the suffering servant of Jehovah and the covenant traditions of the elected and the called people. It is to be noted that the Son of God who has been King, Priest and Prophet identified his prophetic position and task in the suffering servant of God (Isaiah 42:1; 52:13; Philippians 2: 6 – 8).

God’s Messenger:

This qualification is seen to be given to prophets in the later prophecies which reveal the thought that they are messengers of God (Haggai 1:13; Malachi 3:1). Prophets never had any independent tasks to carry out. They were simply those who were assigned to carry out what were entrusted to them by God. All prophets had this insight well within them. Moses was assigned a task to liberate the people of Israel from the slavery of Pharaoh and lead them to the Promised Land through the path of God (Exodus 3:10). Aaron was assigned a task to speak divine messages for Moses (Exodus 7:1). The task assigned to Elijah was to fight for the true God with all sharpness (1 Kings 17 – 19).

Jonah's task was to speak out for the repentance of Nineveh. Thus all the prophets had separate tasks to carry out. They carried out them with sincere commitment.

Ambassador of God:

All the prophets had the feeling that they were chosen and sent by God. "Then I heard the Lord say, 'Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?' I answered, 'I will go! Send me' "(Isaiah 6:8). To the question of God, Isaiah responds positively and he is sent. Jeremiah too witnesses that God had sent him (Jeremiah 26:15). Jonah is sent to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). Generally, the prophets had the task to proclaim and perform what God showed them and what God made them hear.

Herald of God:

It is the duty of a prophet to proclaim what God says, what God does and what God proposes to do. Prophets used to speak about contemporary events as also about future events. More than forecasting future events, prophets were speaking for God. Through direct messages (1 Samuel 3:10), through visions (Isaiah 5:1) and through symbolic deeds, prophets were revealed the will of God which they conveyed to people. We read about many symbolic actions in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Isaiah walked naked and bare feet for three years and exhorted people about the Assyrian invasion to result in the exile of people (Isaiah 20). Similarly, we have strong symbols such as the linen shorts of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 13: 1 – 11), the broken jar (Jeremiah 19: 1 – 11), the sharp sword in the hands of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 5: 1 -4) and the packed bundle (Ezekiel 12: 1 – 16).

There are messages about the coming of the Messiah which are considered very important (Isaiah 9: 6, 7; Zachariah 9:9). The messages of prophets about the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 61: 1 – 3; Luke 4: 17 -20).

Without bothering on what would happen to them, the prophets proclaimed divine messages be them good to hear (2 Samuel 7: 8 – 16) or hinting punishment (2 Samuel 12; 1 – 12). They conveyed the will of God about individuals (Amos 7:17), about another country and its people (Isaiah 4: 1 – 8) and sometimes, about a group of people (Amos 4: 1 – 3). Messages prior to the days of Amos were mostly meant for Kings. From Amos onwards, most of the prophecies related to destruction of Jerusalem (BC 587) and about the authorities, community big wigs and even about incidents affecting the nation itself. During the days of their exile, people were given messages of hope conveying their prospective liberation from slavery (Isaiah 40:1).

Interpreter of Laws:

Moses was the giver of Laws, whereas the succeeding prophets became interpreters of Law showing people the true way as holders of faith. But under the guise of Laws, external rituals became popular; the importance and inner sense as well as the purpose of such rituals got diluted or even lost. Under such circumstances, prophets took initiatives to interpret Laws and the meaning of religious rituals and the true spirituality thereof. Particularly, they took efforts to make people turn to God through true worship (1 Samuel 15:22). God doesn't relish worship made by people who are not bothered about social justice. The people who were rebellious were compared with Sodom and Gomorrah and were taught the Laws in the right way that they would undergo a change of mind. The prophets spoke loudly that sacrifices, prayers, incense offerings, fasting, festivals and assembly of people without justice and ethics were hated by God (Isaiah 1:10 – 15; 58: 3- 6)

Prophets always exhorted very strongly that worship of people without discarding injustice, evil, persecution and exploitation of the society was worthless (Isaiah 1: 16, 17; 58:6, 7; Jeremiah 7: 21 – 23; Amos 5: 21 – 24; Hosea 6:6 Micah 6: 6 – 8). They never taught that worship and rituals were not necessary; instead, they should be sensible, useful and pleasing to God for which the society should take care to ensure that holiness, justice, righteousness, mercy, compassion, love and such other virtues were followed by people. The prophets interpreted and explained the Laws and tradition to enable such virtues to be properly established. They proclaimed redemption for those who followed the Laws and punishments to those who discarded them (1 Samuel 12: 14, 15; 24, 25). Thus, prophets acted as preachers and teachers in the society (1 Samuel 12:23).

All the prophets were interceding for Israel and its people (Amos 7:1 – 6; Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 15:1). Isaiah II presents the suffering servant of God as an intercessor (Isaiah 53:12). The basis of a prophet's interceding responsibility is a representative character earned through his holiness and submission. Through prayers of intercession, prophets represented people of Israel before God and by revealing the will of God before the people, presented themselves as representatives of God.

Social Reformer:

Social reformation also comes up as part of the responsibilities of a prophet. In matters of political governance, prophets used to reveal the will of God to kings and their subjects. In the Hebrew tradition, there was no demarcation between spirituality and materialism. In fact, this is a basic concept of Eastern theological thoughts also. Social and political factors were intermingled in their lives in relation to each other. As such, all these areas came under a prophet to keep his vigil and to intervene whenever the need arose. They worked hard to eradicate the evil and malice of the society. They fought courageously against injustice, immorality, violence, idol worship and lenience to worldly comforts; they initiated true worship system filled in holiness, truth, justice, love, compassion and righteous deeds through which took efforts to work for social reformation. They could work hard in this direction because they believed in a God who stood for justice. They concentrated in their assignment not just as social reformers, but as those who were chosen by God to ensure the will of God in this world.

The above discussed responsibilities and mission were not appreciated by their contemporaries the right way. Indeed, it is even our prophetic responsibility that we realise these tasks and mission and respond to various issues we confront in our day to day life.

Questions:

1. Based on the prophetic positions and responsibilities, what is the prophetic mission of each one of us?
2. Intercession of saints is a core faith of our Church. Explain this based on the lives of prophets. What are the negatives associated with this? How can this be cleaned up?
3. What are the Messianic prophecies we come across in the prophetic books?

Lesson 4

Responses to Prophets

Responses during Old Testament Days # Characteristics of Prophets

Responses during Old Testament Days:

Prophetic mission has its relevance all days. It is significant not only during Old Testament period, but even during these modern days. During the Old Testament days, responses to prophets as also to their messages were very often discouraging. However, not bothering such negative responses, the prophets acted to their call with commitment.

Whenever they proclaimed messages of hope and salvation, they had support and encouragement from the sovereign. However, when the messages used to convey judgment and punishment, they confronted strong opposition and harassment. Ahab treated Prophet Elijah with enmity when he criticized Israel. Similarly, Amos was not allowed to continue his proclamation by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, as the prophecy was against Israel and its king Jeroboam. He admonished Amos, "That's enough, prophet! Go on back to Judah and do your preaching there. Let them pay you for it. Don't prophesy here at Bethel any more. This is the king's palace of worship, the national temple" (Amos 7: 12, 13). Prophet Isaiah faced far tragic consequences; traditions say, he was killed by sword. Prophet Jeremiah was dumped in a pit of clay and on another occasion, was chained (Jeremiah 38:6; 20:2) Prophet Uriah was also killed by sword (Jeremiah 26:23).

The later generations of Israelites have admitted that their ancestors have been harassing prophets and even killed them. Even Jesus Christ criticised the Jewish leaders on this (Matthew 23: 30, 31). Our Lord says, "And so I tell you that I will send you prophets and wise men and teachers; you will kill some of them, crucify others, and whip others in the synagogues and chase them from town to town" (Matthew 23:34). Again he says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God has sent to you!" (Matthew 23:37) and admonishes them.

At the same time, those false prophets who proclaimed hope and safety always had sovereign protection and public favours (1 Kings 18:19). But, the days exposed their fallacy. As prophesied by the true prophets of Jehovah, Jerusalem was destructed. Thus, the falsehood behind those untrue prophets came to light (Lamentations 2:14). Prophets during the exile days exhorted that the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon happened due to the unethical way of life of the people and their unfaithfulness (Isaiah 42:24; 43: 22 – 24).

The prophets were viewed with respect following the exile. Destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon were forecast by these prophets. Once it happened so, true prophets were respected and honoured. This created an enthusiasm among people to collect their words of prophecy and store them properly that the future generation too would gain from them.

Once prophets were respected in the community, views about them underwent changes. They were accepted as the true interpreters of Mosaic Laws. They were seen as leaders who could bring back

people from immoral and malicious way life to the path of truth and justice. They were recognized as leaders who could influence people to stand firm with the divine revelations received through Moses and faith in the true God.

Characteristics of Prophets:

Often, prophets are seen as people who forecast future events. Astrologers, astronomers, palmists and celestial observers are all people who make attempts to forecast events. But the Old Testament prophets were different. They had specific stands on their mission, faith, attitude and approach different from these categories of people.

1. They believed that God, who created everything visible and invisible, has a purpose about the universe and the people.
2. They viewed history as the circle of God's active interference. God acts in history as the creator, as the redeemer and as the saver. Based on this belief, they evaluated historical events.
3. They were inspired to forecast the future because of their unflinching faith in God who doesn't change. They could enter into the intricacies of future from past history.
4. They viewed present day history with all seriousness. Based on the divine protection and ethical insinuations, they interpreted events of the present. Their evaluations on subjects and incidents were related to the view point of God.
5. Intellectually and materially, they made their entry into spirituality. They were rich in insights. But people of today side track spirituality and rely on just intellect and logic. Not that intellect and logic are to be discarded, but these prophets acquired a power to use them and cross over to the other side. We have a very striking example for this. The servant of Prophet Elisha was frightened seeing the army of the king of Aram. He was in such a situation as he was using his external sight with his logic. But the prophet had his inner eyes opened; he saw Jehovah's large army which is always available for our help and our protection. He helped his servant to open his inner eyes to see the large army of Jehovah (2 Kings 6: 8 – 23).
6. They carried out their mission analysing everything in relation to the eternal God. They have made their entry into the presence of God and into the communion with God. This is what gets highlighted in their messages as the fundamental ingredient. Their messages cross the barriers of the limitations of time and space. They proclaimed eternal truth.

Questions:

1. What were the normal responses to prophets?
2. What are the peculiar characteristics of prophetic mission?

Former Prophets # Pre Exile Prophets # Prophets during Exile # Post Exile Prophets # Prophets through centuries – a table # A table of Prophets showing their Life Period # A table of Prophets and kings

It is not easy to identify the periods of different prophets accurately. The periods of some of the kings related to names of prophets, certain incidents recorded in books, yet other internal evidences are all correlated to ascertain the periods of prophets with some accuracy. Scholars have differences in these periods and therefore we would come across variations of periods on referring to different materials. Such differences would be there in this book also to a level. However, what is inferred below would provide inputs on the periods of prophets for a more or less understanding of facts.

Names of prophets are not mentioned below as per the order given in the Holy Bible; instead, it is as per their periods.

Former Prophets:

In an earlier lesson, Former Prophets were briefly discussed. Here views are expressed only about Moses, Samuel and Elijah.

Moses:

Mosaic period is BC 13th century. The Exodus Period is estimated as between BC 1300 and 1200. Archaeological researches have confirmed. The Egyptian records during the days of Sethi I (1313 – 1301) and his son Ramses II (1302 – 1234) have mentions of a Hebrew population (Habeeru, Apeeru). The cities in the names of Ramses and Peethom are believed to have been constructed by Hebrews. By and large, Old Testament scholars believe that it was either Sethi I or Ramses II is the Pharaoh who persecuted Hebrews. The Pharaoh during the Exodus would have been Ramses II (1301 – 1234) or Mer-Nephtha (1234 – 1222).

Samuel:

Prophet Samuel is believed to have lived in BC 10th century. It was during the period of Samuel, rule of kings commenced in Israel. Saul as the first king and David (1000 – 961) as his successor were anointed by Samuel. Samuel who was a prophet, a priest and a judge can be said to interlink the judges and kings of Israel.

Elijah:

Prophet Elijah lived in BC 8th century so also his disciple Elisha. During the days of Elijah, the king of Israel was Ahab.

Pre Exile Prophets:

During the 8th century BC, four prophets worked in Israel and Judah who were Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah.

Amos:

He fought against the decline in ethics and prevalence of evils in social life. He lived during the reigns of Kings Uzziah (786 – 742) and Jeroboam II (788 – 743) [Amos 1:1]. His prophesying period is considered to be between 760 and 745.

Hosea:

Hosea is coming into picture towards the end of Amos. After the decline of the northern country (722 BC), nothing is seen recorded anywhere about Hosea which is an indication that he would have served prior to that. Thus it is expected to be up to BC 725.

Isaiah I (Chapters 1 – 39):

He has been a contemporary of Amos and Hosea (Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Isaiah 1:1; 6:1). He has authored chapters 1 to 39. He has been doing his prophecies during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Micah:

He has authored chapters 1 to 3 and has been a contemporary of Isaiah I. It is seen that he has been prophesying during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Reading verses Micah 1:1, Micah 2: 1 – 5; Isaiah 5:8 ff; Micah 5: 9 – 14; Isaiah 2:6 ff, we can understand the ideological similarities between Micah and Isaiah. Scholars have concluded that chapters 4 to 7 have been authored by someone else in the 5th century BC. Since these four chapters were arranged with the three chapters of Micah, the entire volume of seven chapters came to be attributed to Micah.

Those lived in the 7th century:

Nahum:

Nahum 3:8 onwards narrates the decline of Thebes, which took place in BC 663. The fall of Nineveh is also forecast. Nineveh was attacked by Medes in BC 625 and in the attack of Babylon in BC 612, Nineveh met their fate and fell. On the basis of these historical events, it is presumed that Nahum would have carried out his prophesying before 625 and close to 612.

Habakkuk:

He is also one who lived in BC 7th century. He has commented strongly about the winding up of viciousness. This could be about Assyria or else about Judah or even about the attack of Babylon. The power of Assyria started its decline in BC 612. Babylon attacked Judah in BC 587. The prophesying would have taken place before this.

Zephaniah:

He too lived in the 7th century BC. His prophesying was during the reign of Josiah (1:1). Josiah ruled between BC 640 and 609. The prophesying period of Zephaniah is considered to be BC 640 to 626. In BC 626, Assyria declined totally and Zephaniah would have been active till then.

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah lived towards the end of BC 7th century and early 6th century (627 – 587). His prophesying commenced in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah. It is believed that he had prophesied during the reigns of Jehoiakim (BC 609) and Zedekiah (597 – 587). Jeremiah had also said to have prophesied during the first and second invasion of Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem (BC 597, 587). During the exile, he was captured and sent to Egypt where he died.

Prophets during Exile (587 – 539):

The period of exile means those years BC 587 – 539 when the people of Israel were forcibly taken to Babylon as captives (2 kings 25:21). Habakkuk and Jeremiah are treated as prophets before the exile, but they have prophesied even during the early days of exile. Both have been active with prophecies till BC 587.

Ezekiel:

He lived in the 6th century BC. He worked among the emigrants during the days of Babylon exile. It is stated that he was sitting on the banks of River Chebar (1:1). He has prophesied during the reigns of Jehoiakim (598). It is presumed generally that his prophesying period has been between 598 and 571.

Isaiah II (Chapters 40 – 55):

Isaiah II is known to have authored chapters 40 to 55. He is the second one to have prophesied among the emigrants. The period of his prophecies is understood to be mid 6th century BC. He proclaimed the liberation from Babylonian exile. He has mentioned about King Cyrus in his writings (44:28; 45:1 – 8).

BC 539 saw the fall of Babylon, victory of Cyrus and the liberation from exile. As there are mentions about the deeds of King Cyrus in chapters 40 to 48, it has to be presumed that they would have been written between BC 550 and 539. In chapters 49 to 55, the new community after exile is discussed.

Post Exile Prophets:

Exile came to an end in BC 539 (Ezra 1). Prophets provided renewed courage to people who returned from exile.

Haggai:

Haggai was a prophet who came to be active after the days of exile. He exhorted the people returned from exile to reconstruct the Temple of God. 18 years after the exile, works of reconstruction of the Temple commenced (Ezra 4: 1 – 5: 24). Scholars have opined that Haggai had been working close to BC 521. He lived during the period of Persian King Darius (BC 522 – 486).

Zachariah I (Chapters 1 – 8):

Zachariah too was a prophet after the exile and a contemporary of Haggai (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He worked during the period BC 521 to 519. He had exhorted and encouraged people for reconstructing the Temple. Chapters 1 to 8 of Zachariah were authored during this period. He lived when Darius was the Persian King.

Isaiah III (Chapters 56 – 66):

Isaiah II worked during the exile, but Isaiah III worked among the new community that returned from the exile. It is commonly agreed that chapters 56 to 66 have been written by a third person. Isaiah III had his activities centred in Jerusalem. This prophet has pictured events during a period when Temple was there and sacrifices were quite regular and therefore, it can be presumed that his period would be close to BC 519.

Obadiah:

This is the smallest book of the Old Testament having just 21 verses. There is no conclusive evidence regarding the period of writing this. There is a prophecy against Edom as we read in 1:14 and 15. Thus, the period may be between BC 475 and 450. Verses 15 and 16 – 21 are addressed to Judah and therefore would be written between BC 425 and 400 as opined by scholars. There are striking similarities between Jeremiah 49: 7 – 22 and Obadiah 1 – 10, indicating that both these prophets would have relied on a common root document.

Malachi:

This prophecy is believed to have originated during the rule of Persians. We do not have any information about the author. Verse 3:1 indicates “my messenger” and the prophecy is known after this term. There is a mention about governor in 1:8 and there is a hint that the construction of the Temple is over in verse 1:10 based on which it is inferred that this has been written between BC 156 and 515.

Zechariah II (Chapters 9 – 14):

This prophecy belongs to the period of Greek rule. Chapters 9 to 14 would have been written towards the end of 4th century or the beginning of 3rd century. Zechariah II is accepted as an apocalyptic prophet. There are scholars who attribute his period related to the days Maccabeus by mid 2nd century.

Joel:

This prophecy is also one after the days of exile. On our examining verses 3:1 onwards, it appears that Jerusalem and Judah alone are the territories of the country. It is generally considered that the period covered is just prior to the attack by Emperor Alexander.

Jonah:

This book is authored after the exile. The content of this book is based on early traditions. During the days of Jeroboam II (BC 788 – 743), there is a mention of Jonah, son of Amittai as we read in 2 Kings 14:25. It is also believed that Jonah is a contemporary of Amos. It was during this period, Nineveh was seen as the capital of Assyria. Nineveh was destroyed in BC 7th century. Based on traditions of 8th and 7th centuries, the Book of Jonah would have been authored between BC 400 and 300.

Daniel:

Hebrew canon has not included the Book of Daniel among prophecies; instead, it forms part of writings (Kithubim). But the Greek version known as Septuagint has placed this among prophecies. In its truth, this belongs to apocalyptic writings. During the 2nd century BC, prophecy and revelation were considered the same and thus this book turned to be counted among prophecies. Analysis of the code language of the book indicates that this has been written during the days of the persecutions of Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled from BC 175 to 163.

Questions:

1. Prepare a list of prophets in a tabular form chronologically.
2. Prepare a list of prophets in the biblical order.

Prophets through Centuries

| Century BC | Period Years | Prophets |
|------------|--------------|---|
| 13 | 1300 - 1200 | Moses |
| 10 | 1000 - 900 | Samuel |
| 9 | 900 - 800 | Elijah, Elisha |
| 8 | 800 - 700 | Amos, Hosea, Isaiah I, Micah |
| 7 | 700 - 600 | Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah |
| 6 | 600 - 500 | Ezekiel, Isaiah II, Haggai, Zechariah I, Isaiah III |
| 5 | 500 - 400 | Obadiah, Malachi |
| 4 | 400 - 300 | Joel, Jonah |
| 3 | 300 - 200 | Zechariah II |
| 2 | 200 - 100 | Daniel |

Life Span of Prophets: Before Exile

| Rulers | Century BC | In Israel | In Jerusalem |
|-----------|------------|--|--|
| Assyrians | 8 | Amos ca 760 – 750, Hosea ca 750 - 725 | Isaiah I ca 740 – 700, Micah (1 – 3) ca 724 |
| Assyrians | 7 | History of Jonah Before ca 612 | Zephaniah ca 640 -624, Jeremiah ca 627 – 587, Nahum ca 612, Habakkuk ca 612 - 587 |

During Exile

| | | In Babylon | In Jerusalem |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| Babylonians | 6 | Ezekiel ca 597 – 571, Isaiah II ca 550 – 539 | Jeremiah till 587, Habakkuk till 587 |

After Exile

| | | | |
|------------|---|--|--|
| | | | In Jerusalem |
| Persians | 6 | | Zechariah (1 – 8) ca 521-519 Haggai ca 521 Isaiah III ca 519 Malachi ca 516 – 515 |
| Persians | 5 | | Obadiah ca 475 – 400 Micah (4 – 7) 5 th century |
| Greek | 4 | | Joel ca 332, Jonah ca 400 – 300 History of 8 th /7 th century |
| Greek | 3 | | Zechariah (9 -14) |
| Maccabaeus | 2 | | Daniel ca 175 – 163 |

Prophets and Kings

| Prophets (Biblical Order) | Kings during their time |
|---------------------------|--|
| Isaiah | Uzziah 786 – 742 BC, Jotham 742 – 735 BC, Ahaz 735 – 715 BC, Hezekiah 715 – 687/6 BC |
| Jeremiah | Josiah 640 – 609, Jehoiakim 609/8, Zedekiah 597 – 587 |
| Ezekiel | Jehoiachin 598 |
| Daniel | Jehoiakim |
| Hosea | Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah |
| Joel | King's name not mentioned |
| Amos | Uzziah, Jeroboam II of Israel 788 – 743 |
| Obadiah | King's name not mentioned |
| Jonah | King's name not mentioned |
| Micah | Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah |
| Nahum | King's name not mentioned |
| Habakkuk | King's name not mentioned |
| Zephaniah | Josiah |
| Haggai | Darius 522 – 486 |
| Zechariah | Darius 522 – 486 |
| Malachi | King's name not mentioned |

Lesson 6

Noble Thoughts in Prophecies

Thoughts about God # Choice and Covenant # Divine Justice and Punishment of Sin # Repentance and Redemption by God

What we are discussing in this lesson is looking into the thoughts of prophetic messages in general, the meanings contained therein at their full depth.

Their words and metaphorical deeds were media for expressing prophetic thoughts. All the prophecies commenced, "The Lord Says". They had total conviction that the messages they conveyed were from God (Amos 3:8; 7:15; Isaiah 6:8). They were convinced that the words of Jehovah were really strong. Quite often, the messages were not conveyable through words alone. Under such scenario, they used metaphors as also their own deeds. To indicate the bondage of the people, prophet walked bare footed with his hands chained by himself. Some prophets gave symbolic names to their children as Hosea and Isaiah did. They took all sorts of efforts to ensure that whatever be the means, messages from God must reach the people.

Thoughts about God:

They worked hard to reveal the deep spiritual meanings and relevance imbibed with Jewish traditional teachings and faith by holding on to them firmly. They were people who were re-examining and re-expressing their ancestral faith to address contemporary challenges. It was among the Israelites, the concept of 'faith in only one God' got formulated for the first time. Prophets had played a good role for this. They spoke strongly against believing in other gods.

All the prophets maintained the very same faith regarding the holiness, justice, love, mercy and power of God as also in the interference of God in history. They taught that men and the universe should grow in their relation with God and that moving away from God would end up in their annihilation.

They believed that God interfered in history to reveal Him. As such, revelations from God and His commandments were not subjects of dispute. But they believed that humility in faith, holiness and submission is essential to receive divine revelations and to respond to them. They recognized that the basis for these as the revelations Moses had and the commandments he received. They understood the divine revelations through the nature as well as through historical events and interpreted them to the people.

Choice and Covenant:

God who interferes in history has been maintaining a chosen relationship with Israelites. Prophets have been proclaiming the special choice and the covenant quite powerfully. The prophets have been repeatedly reminding the words related to this choice and covenant to the people of Israel. Some of the prophets have given indications of a new choice and a new covenant on the hope for the future (Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34).

Divine Justice and Punishment of Sin:

All the prophets used to think aloud about the justice of God. Just similar to their proclamations of God's Holiness, they were very prompt to proclaim repeatedly about divine justice too. They saw a considerable similarity between divine justice and social justice. In particular, the prophets of BC 8th century were propagators of social justice. Through a divine view point, they evaluated men and their deeds and thus came up their strong admonition against sin. They accounted for all levels and dimensions where there were interface between God and man. Relationship with God cannot be confined exclusively to external rituals; if so, sin has to be defined as a simple break off from rituals. The prophets destroyed the common conceptualisation of religious life as a ritualistic system. They pointed out that a life where there is no initiative to ensure justice to others is absolutely useless however ritualistic that may be. As an example, let us read what Isaiah says about true fasting (Isaiah 58).

Rituals and customs should carry sense. They should be useful to glorify God as well as favouring man's social goodness. Prophets taught that all the deeds men those are not useful for glorifying God as also not useful for the goodness of men and social integration or causing damages to the community are all sin. Contrary to what we practice now, there was no bifurcation like spiritual and material according the thoughts of prophets. They thought that at all the levels in this universe and in all their deeds and actions and relations, man should experience a communion with God. They implied anything that comes up as obstructions to such communion with God as sin. About sin, what they had in mind mostly was man's indiscipline and intolerance towards God.

Repentance and Redemption by God:

God is Holy; God stands for justice; He loves. Prophets like Hosea were propagators of God's love. Once man repents, God shows compassion; He loves. By repentance, prophets meant bitterly sorrow about sin and the desire to come back to God. Prophets exhorted people who had erred to repent and return to God. This was the great mission for Jonah. What the prophets exhorted was to stay away from evil and malice; they called upon the people to live in holiness and righteousness. The last among prophets, John the Baptist too had been exhorting the very same. The true life of repentance is a life in God's commandments bearing the fruits of a change of mind.

The picture of God the creator saving those who repent is noteworthy. Prophets gave a dimension of Eschaton to this faith. During Eschaton, all creations would turn to God and Spirit of God would be showered on all flesh, was a faith the prophets retained. They worked to bring all creations to the fullness of redemption.

Questions:

1. What were the means employed for expressing prophetic thoughts?
2. What are the truths we see highlighted among prophets? Evaluate their relevance today.

Unit 2

Moses to Elisha

Lesson 1

Moses, First among Prophets

First among prophets # Main events in life # Characteristics of personality

First among prophets:

In Jewish traditions as also in Christian tradition, Moses has been accepted as first among prophets. There are quite a lot of references about Moses in New Testament (Matthew 17:3; John 3:14; Acts 7: 20 – 44; Hebrews 3: 2 – 5; 11:23 – 29). Readings from the books of Moses have been mandatory in Jewish and Christian worships.

Though the 'prophetic system' came into being after the days of Moses, Moses held a second to none status in having revealed to him the 'Will of God and His counsel'. Therefore, Moses had his head high among all leaders of Israel. It should be noted that the active history of Israel had been recorded from the days of Moses. The call of Abraham and the following history of tribal fathers need be considered as just background events in the process of formulating Israelites as a nation. With Moses being assigned the task to liberate the descendants of Abraham from Egyptian slavery, the true history of Israel commences. The great attribute of Moses is that he could confront God face to face and receive messages direct. Moses organized Israelites as one nation and he received divine commandments from God for his people; thus he earned the position as 'first among prophets'.

Main events in life:

Moses lived close to BC 1250 and his was an event filled life. Let us examine this life briefly.

Grew in divine care:

Right from his birth, the divine care was evident. In the Egyptian slave house, Moses was born to Amram and Jochebed (Exodus 6:20). That was a period when Pharaoh and his aides were working out plans to systematically annihilate the Israelites. They had been executing a plan to kill the new born male children of Israelites at birth itself. Parents of Moses had deep faith in God and they feared God which would have influenced the personality of Moses. They protected the infant hiding for three months and then they put the baby in a basket made of reeds covered with tar; this was placed in the river close to tall grass near the banks. There was a great interference of God here; the box caught the attention of Pharaoh's daughter who had come there with her maid servants to take bath. She took the box and having found a baby inside, took him to her palace to rear him up. In the sense that he was pulled out of water, she named him Moses. Thus those who were planning to destruct the Hebrew community were chosen to protect this Hebrew baby. This shows us the great

providential care. We can see later that this providential care was there with Moses throughout his life.

But a grown up Moses depended on his might which resulted in his exile to Midian. He wanted to resist Egyptians who were persecuting his brothers and to liberate Israelites from slavery. But his first attempt ended up a failure; the reason for this failure was that he relied on his intellect and his strength not waiting for a divine call. He had beaten an Egyptian to death and had to run away to the desert. Any initiative without divine call would meet with failure only. But the exile to Midian in the desert was made useful to Moses by divine interference. He reached the house of Jethro and was blessed with valuable pieces of advice; also, his family life to commenced there.

The revelation atop Mount Horeb and the Mission (Exodus 3):

Moses who was rearing his sheep in the desert had a revelation of God in a burning bush on the Mount Horeb. There, he was assigned the mission to liberate the Israelites from slavery. Moses accepted the mission with all humility and submitted himself totally to Jehovah. Thus, he proclaimed the great liberation movement relying exclusively in the might of God and His care.

On the first occasion, Moses relied in himself and failed; now he realised his limitations and his inadequacies and submitted before God relying totally on Him. Moses who longed to share the sufferings of his people (Exodus 2:11) now proceeded with a mission to liberate them and returned to Egypt. God assigned Aaron to assist Moses. There were ten plagues one after the other on the Egyptians after which they were set free by the Pharaoh. People recognized the leadership of Moses. They proceeded to the Promised Land. God took care of them during their sojourn through the desert by providing them protection and helping out whenever they had problems. They were made to cross the Red Sea miraculously; in the desert, they were provided Manna and quail as food; they were given drinking water from a rock. All these acts were counted by people as miracles of God.

To reduce his work load, midway the sojourn, Moses appointed judges (Exodus 18:14). He assigned them to oversee thousands, hundreds and tens. Thus Moses revealed his mind to decentralise authority, which was a trait in his personality worth emulating.

Covenant of Sinai (Exodus 19):

People of Israel set their tents in the desert on the way. Moses climbed Mount Sinai to the presence of God. God made His appearance atop the mountain and conveyed His covenant to the children of Israel. "Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests" (Exodus 19:5, 6).

Then, God gave the Laws to His people. The Laws of God comprehended in the Ten Commandments had their links to all facets of man (Exodus 20: 1 – 17; Deuteronomy 5: 6 – 21).

Moses, the Intercessor:

The people attempted to idol worship in the temporary absence of Moses from their midst by making a bull-calf out of their gold ornaments (Exodus 32). An angry Moses interceded to God for the Israelites pleading their sins to be forgiven. "These people have committed a terrible sin. They

have made a god out of gold and worshipped it. Please forgive their sin; but if you won't, then remove my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people" (Exodus 32: 31, 32). These words reflect the noble aspects of Moses' heart. The compassionate Lord accepted the prayers from Moses and showed mercy on the people.

Moses had a sincere wish to see the face of God; God acceded to this, but to a very limited extent. He was allowed to see the rear side of God's glory while the dazzling light of His presence passed by, making Moses stand in the gap of a rock (Exodus 33: 20 – 23). God's glory is one thing that cannot be seen by any man.

Communion with God made the face of Moses dazzling in light. People were afraid to look at his face because of the splendour. Therefore, Moses was speaking to the people wearing a veil on his face.

End of Moses (Deuteronomy 34):

Moses was not fortunate to make entry to the Promised Land. Moses could only look at the Promised Land standing on the Pisgah on Mount Nebo. Thereafter, he died there and he was 120. "No other prophet has been able to do the great and terrifying things that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:12).

Characteristics of personality:

Moses possessed unusually great personality traits. He had certain characteristics worth emulating even during these current days.

- a. Moses chose to suffer with his people rather than shielding himself in the material comforts offered at the palace of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:11; Hebrews 11:24).
- b. He was always willing to take a look at the suggestions offered by others. He carried out proper decentralisation of authority vested with him. Also, he had the mind to recognise others as his co workers.
- c. He made attempts to honour ancestral fathers and to sustain their memory. The incident of collecting the mortal remains of Joseph from Egypt and taking to Canaan for burying them evidences this.
- d. He was always thankful to God for all his successes. After defeating Amalekites, he built an altar and worshipped God.
- e. Moses is unforgettable as the liberator of Israelites, as a judge, as a leader, as the provider of Laws and in all such capacities he had undertaken.

Questions:

1. Why is Moses considered as the first among prophets?
2. What are the main events in the life of Moses?
3. What are the factors that have influenced the personality of Moses? What all principles we can learn from his life?

Lesson 2

Divine Vision of Moses

Jehovah, the only God of Israel # He is Almighty, Protector and Unique # The One who makes Covenants with men

As the one who has seen God face to face, the vision of Moses on God assumes lot of importance. Let us examine some of the main thoughts on this.

Jehovah, the only God of Israel:

God is one who reveals Himself. Moses came to know about God through such a self revelation. God revealed Himself on Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai with such clarity that Moses could understand Him.

God appeared in that burning bush atop Mount Horeb and when Moses asked His name, the reply was, "I am who I am". With this, rather than the essence of God, His deeds and His power were expressed. In other word, the factual existence of God had to be expressed through deeds and power.

Moses could understand that this God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 6:2, 3). Scholars had opined that there was 'Yahweh faith' in Midian (Exodus 18: 10 – 12). Among the four root sources of Pentateuch namely J, E, D and P, the J source considers the term Jehovah as very ancient. But E and P sources attribute the term Jehovah close to the period of Moses. The tribe of Judah, the authors of J source considered themselves as residing in Midian and worshipping God and that they were never associated with Egyptian slavery. There are scholars who conclude that Moses had been familiarised with the thought that Jehovah was God from the tribe of Judah.

The 'one God' concept is not seen in its fullness. It is not said that other gods were discarded. It was recognized that other neighbouring population had their own gods. However, Moses taught Israelites that only Jehovah was their God (Exodus 20: 2, 3). Jehovah acted in the history of Israel and raised them thereby revealing His greatness. Jethro says, "Praise the Lord who saved you from the king and people of Egypt! Praise the Lord who saved his people from slavery! Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods, because he did this when the Egyptian treated the Israelites with such contempt" (Exodus 18:10, 11). It can be said that it was Moses who laid the foundation of the 'one God theory' in Israel.

He is Almighty, Protector and Unique:

Moses believed that God was Omnipotent – El Shaddai – as revealed to him by God Himself (Exodus 6: 2, 3). God gave Moses a strong faith in the omnipotent God to liberate Israelites from slavery and lead them to the Promised Land. The omnipotent Lord protected His people from Pharaoh and all enemies. This God could provide them Manna in the desert and water from a rock. Those who show unfaithfulness to God would be punished.

This God is compassionate to His people in their tribulations. He said, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt; I have heard them cry out to be rescued from their slave drivers. I know all about their sufferings, and so I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to

bring them out of Egypt to a spacious land, one which is rich and fertile" (Exodus 3:7, 8). Moses revealed that God who listened to the screams of His people and believed in Him.

This God showed them the way. In their sojourn, God was moving ahead of them. "During the day, the Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and during the night He went in front of them in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel night and day" (Exodus 13: 21). God shows the right way to nations and individuals and lead them. The more we live in holiness, the more we experience His presence and His care.

Jehovah, the God is unique. The people around Israelites were practicing their worship of gods and goddesses, and it was at such a time Moses understood a unique God without goddesses. Through the second commandment, God had revealed His uniqueness. When there was the commandment that no other object should be seen in place of God to worship, the people made a bull calf out of gold and worshipped it; Moses' anger raged in fury.

The One who makes Covenants with men:

Moses was convinced that God was holiest in holiness. He believed that since God is the holiest, those who stand in His presence too should be holy (Exodus 3:5). "You must be holy because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44, 45). This command can be heard repeatedly.

Still, the God in His holiness came down to be in relation with Israelites. Among all nations, He chose them as His people. He entered into a covenant with them. "Now if you will obey me, and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, a people dedicated to me alone" (Exodus 19: 5, 6). When the people are faithful and obedient to God, God keeps His promises. Israelites thought of themselves as a Covenant Community. During ancient days, covenants were sealed by participating in the offering of sacrifices. When God entered into a covenant with Israelites that covenant was also sealed through a sacrifice. In this background, the words of Jesus Christ at the time of Last Supper shall be recalled; "This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).

The covenant with God has to be protected in holiness and faithfulness. A man who lacks in holiness cannot live further if he sees the fullness of God's holiness. This was the reason why the surroundings were covered in smoke when God revealed Him in fire. "The whole of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord had come down on it in fire" (Exodus 19:18).

Moses was well aware of the glory of God. Holiness is the basis of God's glory. Splendour of holiness is revealed as light and glory. We have seen earlier about the wish of Moses to see the glory of God. To those who stand in God's presence in holiness are given the light and glory by God. Thus, the face of Moses was seen dazzling with light when he came down from the presence of God (Exodus 34:29). The call of God for us is to be partners in the glory of God and in divine nature.

It is true that Moses learnt certain truths about God as narrated above. Yet, God is much beyond man's intellect and logic which was acknowledged by Moses. When Moses asked for the name of God who appeared in the burning bush, it was not revealed (Exodus 3:14). The name of any object has a relation with its essence. Thus it becomes quite clear here that man cannot comprehend the essence of God, but he can come to about the power of God from His deeds.

Man gets to know the indeterminable God only through what are revealed by Him. To express the presence of God, certain external symbols are always seen to have been used. For example, fire, cloud and smoke. Only those who move up in holiness can understand the essence of God. The appearance of God commenced in fire. Subsequently, the presence was revealed in smoke, cloud and ultimately experienced in the splendour of dazzling light. Even there, there seems to be a 'darkness', a divine Darkness; or something not comprehensive in intellect and logic. In other words, God shall not be understood intellectually, but has to be experienced in life.

Questions:

1. Prove that the divine visions of Moses were related to his life experiences.
2. Have a comparative study between the divine revelations of Jesus with those of Moses.

Lesson 3

Samuel

Prophet, Priest, Judge # Lessons from the life of Samuel

The life of Samuel is discussed in the Book of 1 Samuel. He was from the town of Ramah in the hill-country of Ephraim. Elkanah and Hanna were his parents.

Prophet, Priest, Judge:

Birth and growth:

Samuel was born as a result of intense prayers of his mother (1 Samuel 1:20). The meaning of the word 'Samuel' is 'God has heard'. After the days of his breast feeding, he was taken to the priest Eli at Shiloh and offered him to God (1 Samuel 1: 24 – 28). Samuel grew up with fear of God.

The young Samuel grew up serving the Lord in front of Eli, the priest. God called young Samuel and conveyed to him the forthcoming tragedy to Eli and his family. The family's tragic end was caused by the wayward life style of the sons of Eli. Thus, from his very young days, Samuel grew hearing the voice of God (1 Samuel 3: 3 – 21). God revealed Him to Samuel and conveyed messages during a period when prophecies and visions were not very common. Samuel came to be known as a visionary as well as a prophet (1 Samuel 9:9).

Call for a change of mind:

During those days Israelites were facing a lot of enmity from Philistines. Further, Israelites had distanced themselves from the true God and were engaged in worshipping gods and goddesses of gentiles. Samuel raised his voice against this. People heeded to the exhortations of Samuel to turn away from worshipping gentile gods and get to the fold of Israel's true God. And thus, they came back to the true God and started worshipping Him alone. Samuel prayed to the Lord for the goodness of people.

Prayers of intercession for the people:

Samuel was interceding before God for the sins of the people. They gathered together at Mizpah and there, the people fasted and prayed (1 Samuel 7:6). Old Testament had special mentions of the intercessions of Samuel just like those of Moses. Listen to what Prophet Jeremiah says, "Even if Moses and Samuel were standing here pleading with me, I would not show these people any mercy" (Jeremiah 15:1). Words of the Psalmist too are relevant here; "Moses and Aaron were his priests, and Samuel was one who prayed to him; they called to the Lord, and he answered them" (Psalm 99:6).

The last of the judges of Israel:

Samuel is the last link in the chain of Israel judges. "Samuel ruled Israel as long as he lived". He had judgment centres at Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah (1 Samuel 7:6, 16, 17). After Samuel, Israel did not have judges. From his last days, rule of kings got established.

Samuel, the priest:

Samuel, apart from being a prophet and a judge, carried out priestly functions also. On this, Moses and Samuel can be said to be more or less similar. Samuel had offered sacrifices for Israel and prayed for the people (1 Samuel 7: 8 – 9). Jehovah accepted the prayers and sacrifice from Samuel. Israelites were liberated from Philistines and they defeated Philistines hands down.

Samuel was held in very high esteem religiously and socially. Not only that he offered sacrifices, but also used to bless the food of sacrifice. Whenever Samuel was to be present, the people waited patiently for him to come and bless the food (1 Samuel 9:13). Samuel used to invite guests for the sacrificial meal and showed them respect by arranging them to be seated honourably (1 Samuel 9:22 – 24).

Samuel and rule of kings:

Rule of kings came to be established during the time of Samuel. God had made Israel a nation and led them. They were under theocracy and were led the right way by priests, prophets and judges. When Samuel reached old age, his sons were made judges in his place, but they distanced themselves from God and became greedy; they turned down justice by accepting bribe (1 Samuel 8: 1- 3). Under such a scenario, Israelites approached Samuel and expressed their desire that they might be provided a king to rule over them (1 Samuel 8: 4 – 5). Samuel, as commanded by God, anointed Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1, 17 – 24). Thus commenced the system of monarchy in Israel for which Samuel happened to be instrumental.

Samuel continued to receive messages from God which were conveyed to the king and the people of Israel. He called upon the people to be faithful to God in their life. Saul, who disobeyed the commandments of God was removed from his position (1 Samuel 15:23; 16:1). David was chosen by God to succeed Saul as king and Samuel anointed him (1 Samuel 16:1, 130). Once again, role of Samuel was crucial.

Importance of obedience:

Samuel points out the need to be obedient to God through the life experience of Saul. Saul had said that the goats, cows and oxen captured in the war and kept against the command of God were for offering sacrifice to God. To this logic of Saul, Samuel replied, "Which does the Lord prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey Him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him" (1 Samuel 15:22). This means that God accepts only those sacrifices offered while obeying the commands of God and living in the will of God. This truth was stressed by the later prophets, particularly those of the 8th century BC. Disobedience to God resulted in God's Spirit deserting Saul. Evil spirit came over him (1 Samuel 18:10). This shows that once we are obedient to God, we are blessed with the presence of the Spirit of God and feelings of love of God; once we are the other way, we lose the Spirit of God and consequently, jealousy, hatred, vengeance and quarrel enter us.

Samuel's life after death:

Samuel passed away in his old age. Israelites mourned for him, and buried him at Ramah (1 Samuel 25:1). The life history of Samuel teaches us that the Spirit lives after the death of a person. Philistines attacked Israel again and Saul was in deep trouble. He sought the help of a woman oracle to seek the advice of the departed Samuel. Samuel made his appearance before the oracle. He briefed about the end of Saul; and it happened just the same way (1 Samuel 28).

Lessons from the life of Samuel:

There are quite a good lot of lessons to be learnt from the life of Samuel who gave leadership and guidance to the people as a prophet, a priest and as a judge.

1. Children born in prayers and tears of parents would be blessed.
2. Those who live in the presence and grace of God would be called by God to convey His messages.
3. Once we grow in the Spirit of God, we can execute the true call of our life; we can accept the messages from God and share it with others; we can worship God and serve Him to ensure justice.
4. A life that discards the commandments of God is useless and spoilt.
5. Those who live in the Spirit of God continue to live in relation to God even after they depart this world and would be helpful to us.

Questions:

1. What was the reason why God did not like the wish of Israelites to get a king ordained for them?
2. What were the circumstances that made Samuel rise to be a prophet?

Lesson 4

Elijah

Contrasting Experiences in Prophetic life # Unusual power of an ordinary personality # Appearance and Hiding # Hoping against Hope # One door closes, another opens # Unexpected setback amidst Joy # Fear of enemy and courage # Sharpness at Carmel and the following weakness # Hiding inside a cave and the Call to come out # Wishing death and overcoming it # Disappeared, but reappears

Contrasting Experiences in Prophetic life:

Elijah was a great prophet of Israel who lived in the 9th century BC. He hailed from Tishbe in Gilead, north of Jordan. He carried out his prophetic mission in the northern country of Israel during the reigns of Ahab and his son Ahaziah. The word 'Elijah' means 'Jehovah', my God'. This name signifies total faith, faithfulness and sharpness for Jehovah. The references about Elijah are seen in 1 Kings 17 – 19:21, 2 Kings 1 – 2:11, Matthew 17: 1 – 12, Mark 9: 2 – 13 and Luke 9: 28 – 36. In his life, we can see a spread of nature of duality filled with contrasts.

Unusual power of an ordinary personality:

We read about Elijah as a very ordinary man at the beginning. "A prophet named Elijah, from Tishbe in Gilead" (1 Kings 17:1). In his epistle, James says that Elijah was a man of similar nature as we all are (James 5:17). He adds that Elijah was an unusual personality. He pleaded in prayers that let there be no rain; in that territory, it did not rain for three years and six months. He prayed again and then, rain fell in abundance from the sky. Earth produced its crops (James 5: 17, 18; 1 Kings 17:1). This ordinary man possessed unusual power because of his intense faith in true God and his total dependence in the might of God.

Appearance and Hiding (1 Kings 17: 1 – 6):

Elijah, being guided in the control of God and divine commandments, appeared before King Ahab as commanded by God and prophesied before him about the forthcoming severe drought and scarcity. Immediately, there was the next command from God that he would hide himself near the brook of Cherith. The command of God was to appear on certain occasions and hide on other occasions. Such appearances should not be for self esteem; also such hidings should not be out of fear. Such hidings used to be waiting period to receive power from God; appearances for revealing the messages from God.

Hoping against Hope:

Elijah has taught us that those who believed in God totally and relied on Him completely could alone cherish hopes against hopes. When the land reeled under severe draught, God led Elijah to the brook of Cherith which had water. Crow is a bird that snatches eatables from men, but a crow

carried bread and meat for Elijah every day; and he drank from that brook (1 Kings 17:6). The incident of this crow providing food for the prophet teaches us that children of God would get help even in situations of no hope.

There are learning points for us from the eating habit of Elijah sitting near the brook of Cherith. (1) Simplicity in food and being content in simple food; he was totally content with that simple food twice a day; (2) eating is for survival; living is for eating alone; we see many people around us who seem to live for eating. Elijah could be content with simple food because of his habit of fasting with all its keenness. Fasting and observing Lents are very important. When men find only dry brooks, God can show us wet brooks. We must follow the path God has led Elijah through. God will provide us not only water, but bread also. The bread and water provided to Elijah by God is seen as an indication of Holy Qurbana as explained by theological fathers.

One door closes, another opens (1 Kings 17:7 – 16):

When one door closes, God opens another door to those who follow the will of God and his commands totally. When the brook of Cherith dried, the coming of crows too ended. By then, God had prepared a widow in Zarephath to take care of Elijah (1 Kings 17: 7 – 16). He was commanded to proceed to Zarephath. The word 'Zarephath' means 'place of trial'. When God sends us to various places, He makes proper arrangements before we move in. We can experience these only on our complete reliance in Him. Otherwise, the doors would not be opened for us. In other words, obeying the commands of God is the only way to get new doors opened.

The closed door of that widow of Zarephath got opened because she obeyed the command of God. She was wishing to die with her son after eating bread with the flour she had just for one meal; but she listened to the words of this man from God and shed off her selfishness; she could live comfortably during the days of scarcity. Those who take care of people sent by God would be taken care of by God. "Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward. And whoever welcomes a good man because he is good, will share in his reward" (Matthew 10:41).

Unexpected setback amidst Joy:

Zarephath was really a place of trial for the prophet. The widow was happy that God took care of her and her son during the period of scarcity; but there came an unexpected calamity. Her son fell ill and died suddenly. She started blaming the man of God for this loss of hers, "Man of God, why did you do this to me? Did you come here to remind God of my sins and so cause my son's death?" (1 Kings 17: 18). What thanklessness! But Elijah did not offend at the words of the widow who was prepared to die after eating a last meal with what they had then, but was chosen to live further with the interference of God through him. He relied on God who takes care always and raised her son from death thereby showed her the glory of God. God leads His children to the experience of glory passing them through trials.

Joy may turn to unexpected sorrow. Trials may increase. Let us not use senseless words like the widow of Zarephath. Like Elijah, let us rely on God and submit all our sorrows into the hands of God. We have to be vigilant and awake in prayers expecting unexpected incidents in life. .

Fear of enemy and courage:

King Ahab was determined to destroy Elijah as he prophesied about forthcoming scarcity in the land, but his efforts turned futile. Three years passed. Elijah was living in fear of the king when he received command from God to appear before the king with a new message. He got the courage from God to confront the king. The king addressed Elijah as the one who persecuted Israelites; he boldly retorted that it was the king himself. He further pointed out that the reason for their tribulations were worshipping Baal after distancing themselves from the true living God (1 Kings 18: 17, 18).

Sharpness at Carmel and the following weakness (1 Kings 18: 20 – 19:10):

The sharpness Elijah cherished in his heart for the true God retains his memory even now among the people. He proved at the sacrifice on Carmel that Baal was not at all a god and that Jehovah alone was the true God. He killed with his sword all the 450 prophets of Baal. If we act sharply for our true God, God will act sharply for His children also. Proving that Jehovah was the true God and the He has total control of the nature, there were heavy rains on the land after the sacrifice on Carmel. To see that the heavy rains did not block the path of King Ahab, Elijah was seen to run ahead of the king and protected him (1 Kings 18: 41 – 46).

The queen Isabel decided to take revenge on Elijah for having killed the prophets of Baal. Elijah who stood courageously before the king and those 450 prophets of Baal was now running away fearing a woman. He was subjected to great despair. He even wished to die and lay beneath a tree fully exhausted. There came an angel from God to wake him up and gave him a loaf of bread and water. He was strengthened by this and continued his journey and reached Mount Horeb in 40 days. These 40 days, he was fasting and this fasting made him strong. He spent the night inside a cave on Horeb. God called him there. The courageous Elijah was tired and the words came out his mouth were indicative of his despair. "Lord God Almighty, I have always served you – you alone. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your alters and killed all your prophets. I am the only one left – and they are trying to kill me!" (1 Kings 19:10). What a contrast! The one who was waiting to die now feared death.

Hiding inside a cave and the Call to come out (1 Kings 19: 11 – 21):

God called the one who was hiding in the cave on Horeb, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19: 11 – 21). He was asked to come out and stand before God. God called out of the cave the one who wanted to hide inside the cave. God spoke to him in a soft voice after a tempest, a tremor and a fire. He was assigned certain tasks. God asked him to anoint Hazael as king of Araam and Jehu as king of Israel. He was also asked to anoint Elisha as his disciple.

Wishing death and overcoming it (2 Kings 2: 1 – 11):

Elijah who has been losing out courage quite often wished to die. The one who wished to die overcame death. Jehovah, the true God made Elijah to ascend to the heavens in a cyclone. Thus, he joined Enoch to be in heaven without being dead. As he was rising to heavens, his blanket fell on Elisha who carried out his mission with double the Spirit of Elijah.

Disappeared, but reappears:

Elijah who disappeared as he was taken to heaven reappeared later. The one who disappeared during Old Testament days reappeared in the New Testament days. On the Mount of Transformation, Moses and Elijah appeared before Christ (Matthew 17: 1 – 12). Here Elijah spoke about the forthcoming passions of Christ (Luke 9: 30 – 31). Those who walk with God would be taken by God to live with Him. They will reappear with our Lord as we learn in the life of Elijah.

Questions:

1. Explain the contrasting experiences in the life of Elijah.
2. What are the lessons we learn from the life of Elijah?

Lesson 5

The great Monk who is God's Representative and Israel's Hope

Representing the True God # Hope of Israel # Great Monk # Meeting Jesus Christ

After Moses, perhaps, the people of Israel has memoirs of Elijah live in their mind more than anyone else; so noble and useful was his life. The reason for such nobility was that Elijah lived with God and that God was with him.

Representing the True God:

Elijah had the realisation of his prophetic call when he was moving around as one who represented God. He had a conviction about this position; his response to the call was in line with such conviction and thus, he led a noble life. Stand for Jehovah, the true God, talk for Him, act for Him and fight for Him; facing the consequent losses and sufferings divinely was seen by Elijah as the mission of his prophetic call. He conveyed the message to Ahab as one representing God. "In the name of the Lord, the living God of Israel, whom I serve, I tell you that there will be no dew or rain for the next two or three years until I say so" (1 Kings 17:1).

In the third year of the famine, Elijah conveys the good news of rain, again as one representing God (1 Kings 18:1). In his absolute conviction that he represented the true God, Elijah boldly told Ahab that the reason for sufferings in Israel was Ahab's worshipping Baal. The prophet was seen standing alone to fight for the true God. "Lord God Almighty I have always served you, you alone; ----- I am the only one left" (1 kings 19:10). These words are catching.

The clash with Baal's prophets atop Carmel mountain was an occasion where Elijah was seen at his highest esteem (1 Kings 18: 19 – 40). He summoned all the prophets of Baal and the goddess Asherah and told the gathering, "How much longer will it take you to make up your minds? If the Lord is God, worship Him; but if Baal is God, worship Him" (1 Kings 18:21). Elijah's suggestion that the God who answered with fire would be the true God was accepted by all. Elijah succeeded in

showing that Jehovah and not Baal was the true God. Similar to positions of status conferred to the ambassadors of a sovereign or a country, God gives positions to those who act as His representatives.

Hope of Israel:

During later days, Prophet Elijah was a great hope of Israelites. They expected him to appear ahead of Eschaton. Malachi ends his prophesy with this hope. "But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the Prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; otherwise I would have to come and destroy your country" (Malachi 4: 5, 6). In the Book of Ben Sira, (deuterocanonical tradition and accepted by Orthodox Churches as integral part of Holy Bible) similar hope is seen in 48: 10, "You are destined, it is written, in time to come to put an end to wrath before the day of the Lord; to turn back the hearts of parents towards their children and re establish the tribes of Israel".

According to Christian traditions, this hope of Israelites got fulfilled in John, the Baptist. This is what our Lord says about John, the Baptist, "If you are willing to believe their message, John is Elijah, whose coming was predicted" (Matthew 11:14).

Prophet Elijah and the thoughts about him as also their hope in him were interwoven within Jewish life pattern. His personality was said to be transformed as a petal that cannot be detached from the flower of Jewish history. Hung on the cross, Jesus cried aloud at the ninth hour, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*" (Matthew 27:46) meaning, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me" (Psalm 22:1). Some of those Jews standing close by thought at this loud cry that he was calling Elijah. When the angel had been conveying to Zachariah, about the birth of John the Baptist, he had said, "He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him" (Luke 1:17). The Jewish people who learnt about the extraordinary life style of John, the Baptist and his teachings, sent the priests and Levites to him to ascertain whether he was the Messiah. When the Baptist denied his being the Messiah, they raised their next doubt, "Who are you then; are you Elijah?" (John 1:21). All these lead us to infer that among Jewish thoughts, the hope they had been cherishing as the future hope for Israelites after the Messiah was Elijah.

Great Monk:

Elijah ended up as the ambassador of true God; he turned out to be the hope for Israelites. This was the impact of his hard self discipline, his Lents and his prayer life. Among Old Testament characters, Moses and Elijah are seen as the greatest among those who were most steadfast in hard Lents and fasts. In Christian tradition, we have the tough 40 days fast undertaken by Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:2). Among those who have overcome Satan through the hardest of Lents and fasts, Moses and Elijah are placed together with Jesus Christ.

Meeting Jesus Christ:

We read in Matthew 17: 1 – 8 about Moses and Elijah appearing to Jesus Christ atop the mountain of transformation. Moses died and was buried; Elijah was taken up in body. Therefore, this incident is interpreted by Church fathers as a foretaste of the departed saints and living saints joining

together at the Eschaton. There are fathers who have interpreted Moses as representing married people and Elijah the unmarried. This reminds us that married and unmarried people are equally entitled to the glory of God at His appearance. From all these happenings, what we have to learn is that we should lead a life of prayer observing Lents and fasts and share divine hope with others so that we are moving forwards to be part takers in the glory of God.

Questions:

1. How Elijah came to be eligible to be called as the ambassador of true God?
2. How do we believe that Elijah who was to come had already come?

Lesson 6

Elisha

Elisha, the prophetic disciple # Miracles in Life

Prophet Elisha lived in Israel in the 9th century BC during the reigns of Ahab and Jeroboam. After the days of Elijah, it can be seen that Elisha had worked with double the spirit of Elijah. (Ref.1 Kings 19: 16 – 21 and 2 Kings 2: 9 – 13, 20)

Elisha, the prophetic disciple; the Divine Call and anointment:

Elisha was the son of Shaphat a rich farmer from Abel Meholah in Israel. The word 'Elisha' has meanings 'God saves' or 'God is the saver'. Elisha had his prophetic call through Elijah when he was ploughing his field. Immediately at the call, Elisha left his possessions and followed Elijah (1 Kings 19: 16 – 21).

Witness to the last moments of Elijah in this world (2 Kings 2):

The witness to Elijah being taken to heaven was the prophet's disciple Elisha himself (2 Kings 2: 11, 12). Prophetic disciples from Jericho and Bethel had knowledge about how the life of Elijah would end in this world and they had conveyed this to Elisha (2 Kings 2; 3:5); as such, Elisha always followed his master not leaving him even for a moment. They came to Jordan and Elijah beat the water with his blanket; the water separated into two and they walked across through the dry path (2 Kings 2:8). Before their separation, Elijah told his disciple to ask for a boon; Elisha asked for double the Spirit his master possessed. Elisha told him that he would get it if he could witness their separation. As they were talking, chariot of fire and horses came down and separated them; Elijah moved up in the chariot to heaven (2 Kings 12:11).

The cloak (2 Kings 2:13):

Elijah was taken to heaven by God. While Elijah was being ascended, his cloak fell down to earth and Elisha took it. With that, Elisha got double the share of Elijah's Spirit. That cloak was a symbol of the spiritual strength Elijah possessed. The disciple who served his master received double the Spirit the master had; there is no wonder in this.

Miracles in the Life of Elisha:

There were quite a lot of miracles in the life of Elisha who had twice the Spirit of Elijah. All these miracles reveal the glory of God's amazing power.

Water in Jordan divided (2 Kings 2: 13, 14):

Elisha came and stood before Jordan which was flowing with full water. He beat water with the cloak he got from Elijah. Interceding with Elijah, he prayed to God. Then, the water got divided into two; Elisha walked through the dry path and reached the other side to join the prophetic disciples. It turned to be an opportunity to honour the power of Elijah and they respected him.

Water made pure (2 Kings 2: 19 – 22):

Elisha purified water at Jericho, on the other side of Jordan as desired by the prophetic disciples there. That water had been found harmful to pregnancy. Elisha took some common salt in a new platter and went to the brook to drop the salt into it. Instantly, the water turned pure. He, thus, proved that evil can be transformed as goodness relying on God.

Elisha was travelling to Bethel; some wayward boys mocked at him calling him bald headed and shouted, "Get out of here baldy". He turned back and cursed them in the name of the Lord. Suddenly, two she bears came out of the woods and tore 42 boys into pieces. This incident has to be viewed according to Old Testament thoughts. It was the Spirit of revenge that dominated there. We read in the gospel that once, Jesus asked his disciples 'you are from which Spirit'.

The oil in the jar of widow increased (2 Kings 4: 1 – 7):

One of the prophetic disciples died and his wife and children fell into a debt trap. The creditors initiated steps to take the children as slaves and then, the woman approached Elisha. As suggested by Elisha, she took her small jar of olive oil and poured that little oil into other empty jars she had. To her surprise, all the jars filled to the brim, yet the original jar had some oil left. She borrowed jars from neighbour and transferred oil, but the oil was still there. Thus, she could sell this oil and settled all her debts. She had enough oil to carry on a normal life.

Son of the woman from Shunem resurrected (2 Kings 4: 8 – 37):

There was a rich woman in Shunem who welcomed Elisha and provided accommodation for him in her house. As she had no children, the prophet blessed her to have a child as a token of gratitude. She was very happy to have a son, but some illness took his life later. As her son died, she came to Elisha and expressed her grief. Elisha went to her house and prayed; the son came back to life.

Poison in a dish of stew is cleansed (2 Kings 4: 38 – 41):

When Elisha was staying in Gilgal, a servant was asked to prepare a dish of stew for the prophetic disciples. As he did the cooking, he added some vegetable leaves which were poisonous and finally, the stew was terribly bitter. The disciples shouted, "it is poisonous". Elisha added some flour to it and the stew was made edible.

20 loaves multiplied for feasting 100 men (2 Kings 4: 42 – 44):

A person came and gifted some loaves of bread to Elisha; they numbered 20. The prophet asked the disciples to give the loaves to the gathering assembled there. But since there were more people, they told that loaves are not sufficient. Then the prophet told them how to serve the loaves; they followed his instructions and all those 100 odd men ate to total contentment and the disciples collected balance of loaves.

Naaman cured from leprosy (2 Kings 5: 1 – 19):

Though very courageous and enterprising, Naaman, the Commander of Araam Army was suffering from leprosy. The maid servant at his house was a Jewish girl and as suggested by her, Naaman went to see Elisha with a royal bull. As said by the prophet, Naaman dipped himself in Jordan seven times and he was cured. With this, Naaman started believing in Jehovah. Whatever gifts Naaman brought for the prophet was not accepted by Elisha was a notable characteristic of the prophet. He was only glorifying the Almighty God for whatever he could do in His name.

Elisha sent Naaman without accepting any of his gifts. But his servant Gehazi got attracted to those gifts and went behind Naaman; he collected some of those gifts from Naaman by telling a few lies to him. Elisha came to know about this by his divine insights and questioned Gehazi; again he lied. The leprosy which Naaman was having got passed on to Gehazi. This teaches us that those who follow false ways to earn gains would have to face repercussions thereof too.

The axe which fell down in the river came up (2 Kings 6: 1 - 7):

The disciples of the prophet went to the banks of Jordan to cut a tree. Elisha accompanied them. While they were working with the axe, it slipped from their hands and fell into the depth of the river. As the axe was a borrowed one, the disciple who using it then became terribly upset and he cried aloud. Elisha came forward and threw a branch of the tree in the direction where the axe sank; the axe came up from the depth and the disciple took it.

The inner eyes of the servant opens and the soldiers from Araam turn blind (2 Kings 6: 8 – 22):

The army of Araam was executing plans to enter Israel; Elisha who came to know about this passed on the information to the king of Israel. The king of Araam understood this and sent a section of his large army to take Elisha as hostage. One morning, the servant of the prophet saw a large army of the enemy and got terribly upset. But Elisha helped him open his inner eyes and then he saw the entire area covered with chariots of fire and horses; he was made courageous. Further, Araam army became blind and they lost their way ending up in the middle of Samaria. The Samaritans fed them with bread and water and sent away. Araam army thereafter never made any attempts to invade Israel.

A corpse came back to life after touching the bones in Elisha's grave (2 Kings 13: 20, 21):

Elisha had his divine powers not only when he was alive, but even after his demise. A year after the prophet passed away, Moab army attacked Israel. Some people were carrying a dead body for funeral and the enemies suddenly passed that way. The people carrying the body out of their fear ran away after leaving the corpse in one of the graves there. This grave was of Elisha and as soon as the dead body made contact with the skeleton of Elisha, he came back to life to the surprise of everybody and stood on his legs. This shows that miracles would take place at the mortal remains of saintly people, but that should never be misused as an income generating programme. Thus Elisha glorified God during his life as also after his demise.

Personality of Elisha:

We have seen that Elisha, as if to prove that he possessed Spirit double that of Elijah, did miracles aplenty. Apart from that, there are certain traits in his personality which are truths of life worth emulating by us even in these days.

- a. He was always prepared to accept a divine mission and was happy at that. When he got the call through Elijah, he left his vocation of agriculture and followed the prophet.
- b. He never used his divine powers for selfish gains. As a good example, he did not accept any gift from Naaman. Christ has taught, "You have received without paying, so give without being paid" (Matthew 10:8).
- c. Elisha is seen as a forerunner to Jesus Christ in many respects such as multiplying the loaves, resurrecting the dead, healing the commander for Araam to take care of even Gentiles and so on. Thus, it is seen that in those services Elisha had been carrying out, there was a foretaste of Jesus Christ.

Questions:

1. Among all those miracles performed by Elisha, classify them as those in line with Christian views and those different.
2. What are all those facets in the life of Elisha which attracted you most?

Unit 3

Amos to Ezekiel

Lesson 1

Amos and Hosea

Amos, the Prophet of Righteousness # Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision of Amos # Hosea, the Prophet of Love # Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision of Hosea # Amos and Hosea

Amos and Hosea were prophets who lived in the 8th century BC. Though there are lot to learn about them, considering the limitations for this text book, we are confining our discussions rather briefly.

Amos, the Prophet of Righteousness:

Background:

Amos, considered as the first among written prophets, lived during the reigns of Judea king Uzziah (BC 786 – 746) and Israel king Jeroboam II (BC 786 – 747). There is a mention that the prophecy of Amos was two years prior to the earth quake (Amos 1; 1). In the archaeological excavations carried out in Hazor, there were evidences of an earth quake in around BC 758. There are pointers to this tremor in Amos 2: 3 ff; 3:14; 6:11; and 9:1. These evidences throw light to the period of Amos. The inference is that the prophecy about Israel and neighbouring nations would have been made in and around BC 760.

The social and economic situations during the days of Amos are noteworthy. Israel grew very rich and prosperous during Jeroboam II. There were large inflow of wealth through wrong means and the life style turned luxurious and pompous. This paved the way for injustice, depravity and wrongfulness. The rich persecuted the poor more and more and exploited them to the maximum (Amos 2:8; 4:1; 5: 10 – 12; 8: 4 – 6).

The spirituality then was very low. Depravity ruled the days that accumulating wealth through unethical means and misuse of money paved way for exploitation at its worst and the people gradually drifted away from true practices of religious rituals. They were content with observance of ritualistic practices not bothering about meanings thereof. They followed laws in a literal sense not worrying about the inner meanings. People gathered in the Temple in large numbers to offer sacrifices as per Laws literally. They paid their tithe and offerings. But in their heart, they were far away from love of God, love of man and social justice. Their gathering together at the Temple resulted mostly in enhancing their sin and deceitfulness (4:4). The Temple turned out to be a forum for malice and worship of gentile gods (2:8; 5:26). The priests and religious leadership too joined their hands in this spiritual decline. They mocked at those who stood for truth, justice and righteousness (7: 12, 13). Under such a background, Amos was conveying the divine messages to a rotten community and its leadership.

Prophet and his Message:

The word 'Amos' means 'porter'. He hailed from Tekoa, a village about 8 km south of Bethlehem in the southern territory of Judah. He was earning his livelihood as a shepherd and as a rural farmer plucking wild fig fruits. It was then, he was called by God with prophetic mission (7:14, 15). There is no clue about the prophet in the book because, in the eyes of the author, prophetic message assumed more importance than the prophet.

As Israel was the chosen people of God (3:2), their disobedience to Law was seen by the prophet as basis for punishment from God. (2:4). He laments as the people who were called to blessings are now doomed to be cursed (5:1 ff). The life style of Amos was as simple and clean as an ordinary rural farmer; he could not be silent against the non ethical social customizations and exhibitionist religious practices. He proclaimed divine messages against these ways of life very boldly; such is the relevance of his prophecies. He further proclaimed that there would be judgment from God on those Israelites and neighbouring nations who live distancing themselves from righteousness.

Amos proclaimed messages from God all over the territory conveying the forthcoming punishments of varying nature, slavery, and scattering of people to far off locations; these are consequences of their deeds in life showing negligence to their true God (2: 7, 8), being arrogant (6:8), engaging in social injustice (5:10; 6:12), content to practice external religious rituals not bothering about their inner senses (4:4) and so on. He prophesied that the day of Lord is a day of darkness for them and not of light (5:18). He prophesied further that Israel had to leave their land (7:11, 17). He exhorted that the cause for these punishments was distancing themselves from God, injustice and immorality; as such, they should seek God sincerely (5:6); they should pray for God's grace; they should live in righteousness doing good for others that they are not destroyed; they should follow the rules of justice (5:15). He advised them that they would have peace of mind and would be redeemed if they repent sincerely and turn to God (9: 9 – 15). Let their justice flow uninterrupted like water; let their righteousness be like a stream that never gets dried up; they would have mercy of God in all abundance (5:24). This can be said to be the crux all messages of Amos, the prophet of righteousness. Such people would be redeemed from their exile and would be replanted permanently at the Promised Land. Amos ends up his message by providing hope to those turning to God through repentance, holiness and goodness.

Divine Vision of Amos:

The divine vision Amos had could be seen as very noble. His vision of God certainly is in a practical sense rather than theoretical.

- a. The prophecies of Amos did not confine to Israel alone, but even to neighbouring nations. This is an indication that Jehovah was not the God of Israel alone, but for all people and of all land. It is perhaps more important to see Jehovah as the Lord Almighty rather than the Lord of Israel (4:13; 9:5). The universal vision of God is very important.
- b. God chooses certain people with specific purposes and they are assigned particular tasks and conferred with special titles. But those who break the Laws are punished appropriately (2:4; 3:2).
- c. God, the creator, knows all and controls all (4:13; 8:9). God reveals mysteries to His servants (3:7).

- d. God is holy and righteous. As such, he expects His people too to be holy, just and righteous; He expects all goodness from them (5:24). He hates their worships away from these virtues (4:4). God is pleased in worships only if people are faithful to Him and righteous to the society. Sacrifices are useful only if people live in justice (5: 21 – 23).
- e. Men get spoiled in their arrogance and luxury (6: 4 – 7). Therefore, they are made to pass through different types of tribulations and exile; thereby they are redeemed to salvation.
- f. While God passes His judgment in righteousness, he is loving and merciful. Thus, Amos sees God as one who redeems those having a change of mind. He was deeply thoughtful of the day of the Lord. Those who have been distancing themselves away from God would have that day as a day of darkness and fear; but those who are close to God would have that day as a day of light and joy (5: 18 – 20). The views of Amos are always based on this type of divine vision.

Hosea, the Prophet of Love:

Background:

He lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, coming with his prophecies towards the later days of Amos. That was when Assyria became powerful. Israel had been paying tribute to the king of Assyria and occasionally they had been entering into friendly agreements with Egypt (Hosea 7:11; 8:9). These are all indications of their distancing from Jehovah. The land was blood stained and there was no peace (1:4). Religious and social scenario was worse than the days of Amos (4:2, 6ff, 13, 14). On the one hand, they carried on ritualistic deeds and worships ignoring meanings thereof and on the other hand, they followed worship of gentile gods, thereby turning unfaithful to true God (2:13). Robbery, blunt lies and murders increased in the society (4: 1, 2). Hosea did his prophecies in such a background.

Prophet and his Message:

The word 'Hosea' means 'God helps'. In the 4th scroll containing the prophecies of small prophets, the one by Hosea appears first.

Hosea was born in Israel and carried out his prophetic mission there itself. He evaluated the relation between God and Israel in the light of his own married life (1:3; 4:13). The relationship between God and Israel is as strong as a husband – wife relation. The prophet's wife was unfaithful to him; Israel was unfaithful to the covenant with God (1:2; 6:7). They worshipped the Canaan god Baal (11:2) and offered sacrifices to it (4:11 ff). They behaved as if they have no sense of truthfulness or fear of God or no thorough knowledge of God (4:1). Idol worship and wayward living style was rampant.

God is righteous and therefore, Israel would be subjected to judgment. The unfaithfulness would be punished. At the same time, God being a loving God, would certainly love Israel albeit her unfaithfulness; just like Hosea loved his unfaithful spouse who lived a harlot's life; just like Hosea entered into a betrothal with a whore with all righteousness, justice, fear of God, mercy and faithfulness (2:19, 20). As such, Hosea exhorted people to repent and turn to God (14:1); he further called upon them to grow in compassion and by knowing God (5:15; 6: 1 – 6). God is one who cures illness (6:1; 7:1; 11:3; 14:4); God saves us from the clutches of death (13:4, 5); God provides life (6:2). God's Love is like that of a father (11: 1 – 4) and like that of a noble husband (2:16). The

admonition and message of Hosea was addressed to the priests, to the royal family and to the common men (5:11). While Amos exhorted people to leave their wayward life style and return to justice and righteousness to protect themselves from the wrath of punishment, Hosea highlighted the love of God and called upon the people to remodel them in the knowledge of God and in compassion to show their love and faithfulness to God so that they could keep their covenant intact with Him in love and faith.

Divine Vision of Hosea:

We can learn about Hosea's divine vision from his book itself.

- a. Jehovah alone is the true God (13:4). Turning to other gods is adultery (1:2).
- b. God is love personified. His goading and punishment are nothing more than expression of love (2:14). The metaphors Hosea uses to illustrate the love of God are father's love (11:1), husband's love (3:10 and doctor's love (6:1).
- c. God cures (6:1; 7:1; 11:3; 14:4). God provides life (9:2). God saves (13:4, 14).
- d. God is one who encourages people for a change of mind and showers His mercy and love abundantly thereby transforming them filled in hope (14).
- e. God keeps personal relationships. Only then, love, mercy, compassion, justice, righteousness are all becoming meaningful.
- f. God has a relation with man that is a covenant relation. For the sustenance of a covenant, what are needed are love, faithfulness and a life of ethics. God is faithful. The unfaithful responses from the people leads to breaking the covenant and thus they distance themselves from God.
- g. God is not pleased with external ritualistic performances. What God looks forward to is His people grow in compassion and knowledge of God so that their rituals could make sense (6:6). Others would slip down (14:9).

Amos and Hosea:

Both Amos and Hosea have common traits a lot. May be, their points of stresses vary here and there. Both were contemporaries who lived in 8th century BC. Social background too was similar. Decline of ethics was more rampant during the days of Hosea. Amos stressed on the punishment for immorality and proclaimed righteousness as the sign of a divine relationship; Hosea was giving stress on the love of God and thereby called upon the people to show faithfulness to God. The exhortations of Amos were mostly addressed to the rich, but Hosea admonished all irrespective of their status (5:1). Both have been exhorting the people for a change of mind. They have strongly attacked the senselessness of external religious rituals. Illustrations of religious rituals are seen more in Hosea. Both these prophets have been very strong to proclaim that God likes only a moral and righteous life. The relation between man and God is religion. Both these prophets see God as one who interferes in history. In short, the divine visions of both are more or less similar.

Questions:

1. Explain the life, message and divine vision of Amos.
2. What are the lessons we have form the life of Hosea? What are his thoughts and messages?
3. How are Amos and Hosea related?

Lesson 2

Isaiah

Critical View # Isaiah I # Background # Prophet and Message # Divine Vision

The research studies carried out on the Book of Isaiah have brought out lots of information, in particular, about the authorship, the period when it was written and uniformity of the ideas covered. Let have a brief discussion on them.

Critical View:

The researches by J G Icon – Eichhorn - (1827) and B Duhm (1892) brought out that the author of the book with 66 chapters is not one person. They established that the book contains prophecies of different prophets lived during the period from BC 740 to 300. Thus they divided book as one authored by three prophets.

- a. Isaiah who lived during BC 8th century (740 – 700) has authored chapters 1 – 39 and we may call him Isaiah I.
- b. The chapters 40 – 55 has been written by another person who lived in BC 6th century (587 – 538) whom we can call Isaiah II.
- c. The remaining part chapters 56 – 66 would be written by yet another person lived during end of 6th century BC (after 548). Let us call him Isaiah III.

Isaiah I prophesied before the exile; Isaiah II during the exile; and Isaiah III after the exile.

The messages of Isaiah I was recorded by his disciples in poetic form (8:16). Subsequently, based on these poetic data, the disciples would have done exhortations matching different occasions and period. These were added to the earlier ones. Thus, The School of Isaiah was formed; or in other words, this came to be known as the disciple sect of Isaiah. This sect was in existence even after the fall of Jerusalem (BC 578) as also even after the days of exile. During the exile, another person of unknown identity proclaimed the message of Isaiah modified as suited to his time which is accepted as the part acknowledged in the name of Isaiah II. After exile, during the days of reconstruction of Jerusalem another great prophet came into picture. Again, he too is of unknown identity and his proclamations are known as the third part or Isaiah III.

The proclamations of Isaiah II and III are basically indebted to Isaiah I for the richness of the contents. All these three prophets believe that Jehovah, the Holy God of Israel and all the populace of this universe are instruments of God. This thought formed the base for their messages. God who acts in history in not just one who punishes, but He also keeps His covenant with David (9: 6, 7; 11: 1 – 4). The mission of God would be accomplished through the faithful remnant of Israel. God's city of Jerusalem would be protected by Jehovah (29:5 ff; 37: 33 – 35). This was a strong belief of Isaiah and he proclaimed it. The thoughts Isaiah I possessed regarding eschatological events, his hope on the faithful remnant, messianic prophecies and vision about the transformation of Jerusalem (1:26; 2:2 ff; 32: 1- 5) were seen in the other two also but with a progressive continuation. All these are history

linked and therefore people of God would be blessed and they would prosper; the true God would be worshipped by other people also; all the three prophets think alike on these matters.

The uniformity of their thought processes would have prompted scholars to consider their prophetic writings as one volume. The Book of Isaiah as we see today came to be available during the period BC 400 to 200. All the documents and writings bearing relations to Isaiah were compiled into one. Thus, the 66 chapters came to be known in the name of Isaiah. In the scrolls of the book of Isaiah unearthed from Qumran caves known as Dead Sea scrolls as well as in other Hebrew manuscripts, this book is seen in the same manner. However, scholars have shown this as three separate sub volumes just to indicate the differences in the time periods when the prophecies were made.

Matters revealed from critical evaluations:

- a. Based on the chronology, the messages of these three prophets are placed in the book separately.
- b. There are differences in political and social backgrounds.
- c. There are variations in presentation and language.
- d. Though their thought processes are quite similar, ideological contents in their proclamations contain some differences. The exhortations before the exile, during the exile and after the exile have variations as suitable to the occasions.

Isaiah I:

Just like Amos and Hosea, when the Hebrew religion showed declining signs in BC 8th century, the Prophet Isaiah attempted to awake their conscience.

Background:

Isaiah I carried out his prophetic mission during the reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah and his successors Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah. During the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, the might of their enemy Assyria had been showing declining trends. Utilizing this situation, both Judah and Israel had more political freedom and their social status enhanced. Simultaneously, injustice grew up and ethics went down (Isaiah 1: 21 – 23). With the demise of Uzziah, Assyria grew powerful; Judah and Israel got weakened. They entered into alliances with neighbouring nations. Here, Isaiah I raised his voice as a true prophet of true God proclaiming that these changes in them were the result of their lack of faith and reliance in God (6:8). Both Judah and Israel had declined politically, economically and spiritually; greed and injustice ruled the day. They neglected their covenant with God and concentrated in idol worship, gentile rituals and relied on the neighbouring nations' power. They forgot their true God totally. In BC 701, Sennacherib king of Assyria visited Jerusalem and Hezekiah offered him the whole wealth of the nation. Isaiah strongly raised his objections to all these deeds. He advised the king not to surrender to Assyria. Lastly, Sennacherib returned. The messages of Isaiah I have to be understood in such a background.

Prophet and Message:

Prophet would have born close to BC 765. He was a citizen of Judah belonging to a noble family. There are mentions of his writings in 2 Chronicles 26:22 and 32:32. The word 'Isaiah' carries meaning 'Jehovah is salvation' and 'Jehovah saves'. He had close relations with the king's palace (36 –39).

Based on his vision of divine call, it is believed that he would have been holding some responsible position in the Temple (6). He carried out his mission for 40 years. We do not have any further information about him after BC 700. The tradition is that during the reigns of Manasseh, successor of Hezekiah, the prophet was chopped by a wooden saw.

He was very much concerned about his own sins and was keen to get redeemed from them (6:5) more than the sins of others though he was teaching the people and proclaiming about divine punishments and redemption (8:16). His thoughts and messages were formulated out of his deep insights on the Almighty Lord, the glorious and Holy Jehovah of Israel (6:1 – 4; 3:11, 12, 17; 26:4; 30:18; 33:5). His messages are imbedded in virtues of holiness and humility.

Jehovah reared Israel in love and care akin to a father loved and cared his children. He expected holiness and faithfulness from them in return. But the king and his subjects together competed with God and turned up unfaithful and unholy (1:2 – 6). He exhorted them about the forthcoming punishment (1: 7, 8). He proclaimed that the punishment would be implemented through Assyria (10: 5, 6). Fall of Israel became a reality in BC 722. The relation between God and Israel had specific characteristics. This was illustrated through the metaphors of family (11: 2, 3) and garden (5: 1 – 7).

The prophet proclaimed that there would be small remnant that would be saved by God (1:9; 6:13; 28:5). As an indication to this, the prophet named his son Shear-Jashub, which means 'a remnant will return' (10:20 ff).

He taught that unrighteous worship would be rejected and hated by God (1: 1 – 15). Isaiah's righteousness and that of Amos are quite similar. He exhorted the people to live in righteousness (1: 16 ff) and conveyed the message of hope to those who have a change of mind; he also gave the message of ruin to those who compete with God (1: 16 – 20, 27, 28; 30:15). He proclaimed that God would take revenge on the enemies of Israel and save them (1: 24 – 26; 2: 2 – 5; 5: 11; 14:1). Isaiah I further proclaimed the glory of Jerusalem as also its ruin.

The prophet further taught the people about a hope filled Eschaton. The word Eschaton doesn't mean the end, but it really means the future at the fullness of time. Then, Jerusalem will be honoured. All nations would turn to true God (2: 2, 3). He conveyed the thought of God about other nations and gentiles (13 – 23). He proclaimed that Jehovah is not the God of Israel alone, but of the entire universe (2:4). Those who rely on other nations and their military power rather on Jehovah will be doomed at the end (31:1). Enemies of God would be destroyed (27:1).

Another important message from Isaiah I was about the Messiah (8:14, 15; 9:6; 11:1 ff; 32:1 – 4). Messiah is the redeemer and king. In his days, justice, peace, joy and hope will prevail. Christian Church believes that these prophecies are realised in Christ. (Compare the verses Matthew 1:22, 23; Luke 1: 31 with Isaiah 7:14)

His exhortations stressed that those who forget God and being arrogant would be annihilated (14: 12 – 17) and the egoists, the luxurious and the enjoying will face sorrows in life (28:1). He admonished courageously the priests and prophets of these types (28:7 ff). He ends up his mission with the illustration of King Hezekiah, who lived in total submission to God, convincing all that those who know God would have peace of mind and would experience holistic healing.

Divine Vision:

Isaiah possessed more or less the very same views as other contemporary prophets about God. He has, perhaps, stressed certain aspects more strongly. Isaiah was more concerned about the holiness and glory of God who was righteous, just, merciful and loving (6:3). God who is Holy wanted His people also to be holy and humble. God is the God of all (6:3). He is at the same time distanced and nearby. In His holiness, God is distanced, but by His interference in history, He is nearby. He controls history by interfering in it. He uses Assyria to implement punishments (10: 5, 6). God saves those who are faithful and holy; he punishes those who discard the covenant. He seeks a righteous life through worships (1:16 ff). God keeps a special relationship with those chosen by Him and in return, expects a responsible way of life from them (1, 2, 3. 5:1 -7).

Like Amos (5:18 - 20), Isaiah too was quite aware of the Day of the Lord (2:5 – 17). His messianic prophecies reveal a God who always redeems his people who are in tribulations. The Almighty Lord who is Holy provides glory, success, holistic healing and life to those who are in total submission to Him and living in humility (38). Based on the above sorts of divine feelings, the prophet led his life conveying divine messages which are really noteworthy.

Questions:

1. What are the bifurcations in the Book of Isaiah?
2. Explain the life of Isaiah I and his message.

Lesson 3

Micah, Nahum

Prophet Micah # Background # Prophet and the Message # Religious Insight # Messianic Hopes # Divine Vision # Prophet Nahum # Background # Prophet and the Message # Divine Vision

This lesson discusses briefly prophets Micah who lived in BC 8th century and Nahum who lived in BC 7th century.

Prophet Micah:

Background:

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah I living in Judah. His mission was during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Micah too raised his voice against the rotten social, economic and religious situation prevailed then in Judah. As Judah had been maintaining good commercial relations with its neighbours, the rich and smart among the people made a lot of money and the poor were exploited. During the time of Hezekiah, large sum of money was required to pay tribute to Assyria and to strengthen the fortress walls of Jerusalem. This money was raised by squeezing the poor farmers of the country. In this background, Micah had to carry out his prophetic mission.

Prophet and the Message:

The word 'Micah' means 'who is equal to Jehovah?' (Micah 7:18). The native place of Micah was Moresheth-Gath which was just 27 km away from Tekoa, the native place of Amos. Thus, right from his young days, Micah would have heard of Amos who was sharp with his stands on righteousness and ethics. A scholar had even addressed Micah as the resurrected Amos, which was quite meaningful. Micah appeared as a leader of farmers and shepherds and resented the fatigue and exploitation they faced from land lords; he got angry at the economic inequality and injustice prevailing in the society.

Message of Micah was against the corruption and unethical ways of the society (1 – 3); injustice and immorality played a major role in the land (1: 5 – 6; 3: 9 – 11). The leaders, prophets and priests who had their responsibilities to awaken the conscience of the people all owned frozen mind set up. Drunkards and falsehood propagators turned out to be prophets for them. Micah was very sorry at these developments and raised his voice against them. He proclaimed that due to the outrage, injustice and immorality (3:9), capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem would be destroyed (1:6; 3:12). The people had their hope that Jerusalem being the city of God would never be destroyed. Jeremiah and Uriah too proclaimed the same message. (Jeremiah 25: 6 – 20). A place has its divinity only till such time God inhabits there and only then, man would remain divine. When man moves away from God, both man and the place become doomed.

There are two sides for the messages of Micah: one, for destruction and the other, for redemption. Along with his admonition against unrighteousness and injustice, he criticises sharply the exploitations against the poor and marginalized farmers. He found fault with those who held the properties of others without any justifiable cause to enjoy benefits thereof and with those judges who made their judgments by accepting bribes as also those who prophesied with selfish motives leaving aside ethics and truth; to such people and to those who were bound to be engaged in unethical deeds, he proclaimed the wrath of God and the forthcoming punishments (3:11, 12).

Along with punishments, the prophet proclaimed messages of redemption also. Jehovah is the shepherd and he wants goodness for his people. Even if his people would be scattered due to punishments, a faithful remnant would be gathered together and they would prosper (2:12; 5:3). This was the soothing message from the prophet. He conveyed messages of hope about the land of peace and the lord who redeems them. The justice and judgment of God enlightened him. He wound up his mission with a hope that love of God and the virtue of forgiveness would enable the people to reconcile with God. The message of Micah touched Hezekiah deep in his heart enabling a change of mind; he turned to God and ensured spiritual reformation in the country (Jeremiah 28: 18, 19).

Religious Insight:

Micah had very specific religious insights (6: 6 – 8). Nobody can please God through sacrifices or external rituals. Not that they are not required; there should be a life of righteousness and then religious rituals make sense and are useful. Those who lag behind in a life of ethics and social justice cannot truly worship God; they cannot really know their God; Micah firmly believed so. God expects justice, love and humility from His children. This verse reveals in all its clarity the religious insights of Micah. "No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love and to live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:8).

This verse can be called the 'Magna Carta' of prophetic religion. The religious insights of Micah contain the righteousness of Amos, the messages of love of Hosea and the holiness and humility of Isaiah I. This is relevant as of then even today. Any worship would be lively it comes out of faith in God. The character and nature of a believer has to be formulated from this.

Messianic Hopes:

Micah had clear cut understanding about Messiah. In his 4th and 5th chapters, there are discussions on the new day, the messianic era, Eschaton and the final days. Messianic expectations are seen visibly in Old Testament in the Book of Micah for the first time. He has discussed not the redemption alone, but the person behind the redemption. The origin of a messianic concept modelled on David is seen here (5: 2 – 4).

Divine Vision:

Micah shares with other prophets of BC 8th century the divine vision that was held commonly. Jehovah is the true God. God hates and punishes injustice and immorality. Since God is just and merciful, those who are faithful to God and those who change their mind would be redeemed. God always takes side with the persecuted and the insulted, as well as with those who show righteousness, justice, humility and compassion. The prophet sees a God who expects His children to do as he can or as per his ability. He wants them to be simple righteous, compassionate and humble before Him.

Prophet Nahum:

Background:

The prophecy had been made in the background of the cruelty and aggressive initiatives of Assyrian empire and consequent destruction of its capital Nineveh as also in the hope of Israel's redemption.

Prophet and the Message:

Nahum is believed to have lived in Elkosh; but the location of this place Elkosh is yet to be identified foolproof. This is considered to be somewhat close to Jerusalem. His prophetic mission would have been accomplished between BC 664 and 603. The word 'Nahum' has meanings such as 'comforter' and 'God comforts'.

Unlike other prophets, Nahum is not seen to have made attempts to criticize the evil deeds of the people or making efforts to sustain them in true faith. His mission was confined to comforting the Hebrews that those who harass the people of God would be destroyed by God. His prophecy contains admonition of the arrogant Nineveh and messages about her annihilation. He has warned about the forthcoming invasion from Babylon (2:1, 2; 3:8). He cites the example of the Egyptian town Thebes to point out the fall of Nineveh. Verses 2:4 – 8 forecast the fate of Nineveh. Whereas Babylon grew in strength, Nineveh got destroyed in BC 612.

Divine Vision:

Our Lord Jehovah is our God who is the Creator of history. The omnipotence of God is beyond all powers of nature. He uses His might as He pleases (1: 3 – 5). God would not remain silent when His

chosen people are persecuted. The enemies of His people would be destroyed and insulted (2:13; 3: 1 – 7). Thus, Jehovah would glorify Israel (2:2). This divine vision of Nahum has made the Hebrews favourites of this book. Jehovah not only guides nature and history, but He also punishes and destroys evil. The religious insights or righteousness or ethical sharpness is not seen in Nahum, but his divine vision is very noble.

Questions:

1. Comparing Micah with other prophets of BC 8th century, explain the nobility of his teachings.
2. How the prophecy of Nahum does differ from others? What is the crux of his teachings?

Lesson 4

Habakkuk, Zephaniah

Prophet Habakkuk # Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision # St Paul and St James from Habakkuk # Prophet Zephaniah # Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision

We are discussing in this lesson two prophets Habakkuk and Zephaniah who lived in the 7th century BC.

Prophet Habakkuk:

Background:

The prophet lived in Judah. By BC 7th century, Babylon grew very powerful. In BC 605, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt in the battle of Carchemish and moved ahead of other nations. At the same time, evil became rampant in Judah and morality reached rock bottom. Men of righteousness were persecuted. Why does Jehovah keep silent? Would the righteous be destroyed along with the wicked? The background of this book can be said to be these thoughts as also the absolute faith in God.

Prophet and his Message:

It is presumed that Habakkuk carried out his mission between BC 605 and 597. The meaning of the word 'Habakkuk' is 'one who is beloved to God'. It also means 'fruit bearing tree' in Acadian language. It is understood that he was a singer in the Temple (3:19). He was a contemporary to Nahum, Zephaniah and Jeremiah. We can see an influence of the prophetic thoughts prevalent in the 8th century BC in him to a substantial extent. This prophet had been one who had to confront difficult situations in life. A noble trait we see in him is that he submitted himself totally before God with a sorrowful heart at the unjust ways of the society and got solace. While he was meditating about the ways of God in submission to Him, he used to receive prophetic revelations.

He carries out an argument with God seeing the abundance of evil and growth of the wicked in Judah as well as the persecutions faced by the righteous (1: 1 – 4, 13, and 14). There are similar

thoughts in the books of Jeremiah (2:1) and Job. Whatever messages he received from God in this connection are the main contents of this book.

- a. The wicked will be destroyed for their injustice. As such, Judah would be punished because of its evil. The punishment would be implemented by Babylon (1: 5 – 10). The wickedness of Judah would be destroyed by the wickedness of Babylon. Babylon too would be destroyed due to their wickedness. Wickedness would pave way for one's own destruction (1:16; 2:12). Thus the message concealed here is the prophetic call to leave evil and do good.
- b. The righteous will live because they are faithful to God. Just as God punishes the evil, He protects the virtuous. The question, "Would the righteous be destroyed" is answered here; "the righteous will live because they are faithful to God" (2:4). This faith has formed from the thought that those who are faithful to God would be a remnant.
- c. Those who look forward to redemption have to rely on Jehovah and not on dump idols (Isaiah 7:9; Habakkuk 2: 18, 19). Jehovah alone is eternal, holy, glorious and praiseworthy (1:12; 2:14, 20; 3:3). In the prayer hymn we see in chapter 3, we have Jehovah as the one who guides history (3: 5, 6) and total faith in the one true God who has this universe and history in His fold.
- d. Habakkuk raised his voice strongly against greed (2: 6 – 8), violence, crime, luxury (2: 9 – 12), intoxication, arrogance (2:5, 15, 16) and faithlessness (2: 18, 19).
- e. True joy doesn't come from material blessings or material gains. One has real joy in him provided he has true faith in God and relies on Him in its absoluteness (3: 17, 19).

Divine Vision:

The prophecy commences with a dialogue with God to receive revelations from divine presence and ends up with thoughts filled in hope. God is righteous. He punishes injustice; He rewards justice. The prophet has revelation of a God who showers joy that is not of material nature as also eternal life to those whose deeds are righteous and faithful to God.

St Paul and St James from Habakkuk:

Prophet Habakkuk was one whom St Paul appreciated a lot. The apostle has been quoting Habakkuk as a basis for his theory, 'justification thorough faith' (Rom. 4:3; 5:1; Habakkuk 2:4). The prophet says that the righteous live in faith whereas the apostle argues that reconciliation with God is through faith. St James establishes that faith has to be shown in righteous deeds (James 2:17, 20). We can see the close association of faith and righteousness in all these verses with very minute variations.

Prophet Zephaniah:

Background:

Assyria became very strong by mid 7th century BC. Judah king Manasseh (687 – 642) entered into friendly alliance with Assyria. Inter religious faith started spreading among people. They saw Jehovah as one of the many gods. Cashes among people grew among the people; malice was very common; persecution increased (Zephaniah 3:1). The people, the priests and the prophets went astray from true faith. Zephaniah raises his voice in this background.

Prophet and his Message:

Zephaniah was a Jew who lived when Josiah was the king of Judah (BC 640 – 609). It is believed that he has been a contemporary of Jeremiah and that he was related to the royal family. He did his prophetic mission in the background prior to Josiah carrying out the religious reformation in BC 622. It is right to infer that Josiah was inspired by the exhortations of Zephaniah for implementing his religious reformation. The word 'Zephaniah means 'Jehovah protects'.

We can see the influence of Amos and Isaiah in Zephaniah. He presented their thoughts with a greater sense of vigour. He raised his voice against the social injustice that had been rampant in the land (3: 1 -5). He conveyed the message of punishment from God for their idol worship (1: 4 – 6), foreign policy (1:8), rebellious practices, corruption and oppressions (3:1). He called upon them for a change of mind in them (2:3). His message of punishment and redemption, though touched Israel in particular, was for the whole universe.

The initial message from Zephaniah was "The great day of the Lord is near" (1:7, 14). The day of the Lord would be a day of punishment for those who are wicked and a day of redemption for those who live in fear of God, justice, righteousness and meekness (1: 14 – 16). The prophet meant a day of punishment for Judah and Jerusalem by saying in particular, the day of the Lord. But the day of the Lord would confront natives and foreigners in the same way. The day would be a tough one for those who act in wicked manners. It would be a day of hope only for those who humble themselves before God. He provides Eschaton thoughts also for the day of the Lord. The day of Jehovah is seen as a day of joy and festivity. This prophecy carries the message of sacrifice on the day of Jehovah (1:7, 8). Those who take part in the sacrificial feast are expected to wear attire to suit the occasion. This is the attire of holiness. The eligibility norms to participate in this sacrificial feast are holiness in life, righteous deeds and faithfulness to Jehovah. It is this sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ performed on the Calvary (Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 11: 23 ff).

Another message was to repent and have a change of mind. This message of change of mind was applicable equally to lords of the society, judges who practiced injustice, prophets who acted deceitfully and in falsehood, priests who didn't care for true patterns of worships and the ordinary men who embraced wickedness in life (3: 1 – 4). The message to have a change of mind was equally strong as those of the 8th century prophets. He reminded the people that unless they repent, judgment would fall upon natives as also on outsiders.

Divine Vision:

The prophet saw God as one who hates and destroy evil and redeems those who repent and change their minds. He expects faithfulness and holiness from people. He looks forward to see the nature of God getting reflected in His people.

Questions;

1. What are the main messages from Prophet Habakkuk? How are they related to New Testament thoughts?
2. What is the message from Zephaniah? How has he understood the day of Jehovah?

Lesson 5

Jeremiah

Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision

In this lesson, we are discussing Prophet Jeremiah who lived in Jerusalem during the second half of 7th century and first half of 6th century BC.

Background:

Jeremiah carried out his prophetic mission during the reigns of Josiah and his sons Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (1:2, 3). His mission lasted till the days of exile and the fall of Jerusalem. He has been chosen by God to convey the message of punishment and redemption during the decline of Judah.

Those were days when Assyria was on the decline whereas Babylon was ascending in power. The messages from Jeremiah came in the background when Babylon was growing from strength to strength and Judah was slipping down. The religious and social scenario was very much rotten then. During the reign of Josiah who was a worshipper of Jehovah, religion and worship underwent reformation. Jerusalem was made the sole centre of worship. Passover festival was observed. The covenant relationship was renewed. Yet, the changes were external and peripheral. The evil reign of Manasseh had resulted in increased idol worship ending up in the prevalence of immorality everywhere (7; 22:13). The efforts to liberate Judah from the clutches of these evil traits to turn the nation into a God fearing one did not succeed. The reformation did not bring about a sincere change of heart. Those who were following true faith were persecuted. People accommodated gentile gods in the Temple of God (7:30). Justice and righteousness disappeared (22:13, 14). There was nothing like faithfulness anywhere (5:1). Greed for money increased (6:13). One has to understand the mission of Jeremiah basically in these backgrounds.

Prophet and his Message:

More than any other prophet, we can understand a lot about the author from the book itself. He would have lived from 647 to 587 BC. The period of his prophecy is understood to be between 627/6 and 587/6. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah too has been interfering in matters of political governance and revealing the will of God. He was born in the tribe of Benjamin in the town Anathoth near Jerusalem as the son of a priest named Hilkiyah (1:1). We can learn about his personal background from a biography understood to be written by Baruch, his disciple as also from his own autobiographical narrations (36:4). Whenever prophets and priests did wrong, Jeremiah conveyed the true message from Jehovah. When such messages admonished them, they stood against Jeremiah (26:8). A priest Pashhur beat him up and got him imprisoned (20: 1, 2; 37: 14 – 16). He was made a laughing stock (20: 7, 8) He was in deep trouble (20:18). But under all these situations, Jeremiah stood for Jehovah. He continued to convey the message of punishment and redemption (39:11). He lived and died for God. The word 'Jeremiah' means 'Let God raise'.

Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king defeated the combined Egyptian – Syrian forces at Carchemish in BC 605. Jehoiakim, realising the might of Nebuchadnezzar declared his loyalty to him initially, but later backed out and in alliance with Egypt, stood against Babylon; consequently, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah in BC 598. In 597, Jehoiakim passed away. And Judah surrendered to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar entrusted the reign of Judah to Zedekiah and started accepting tribute from him. However, Zedekiah entered into an alliance with Egypt and attempted to attack Babylon. This resulted in Nebuchadnezzar invading Judah again and Jerusalem city and the Temple was destroyed in fire in BC 587. The king and many of the subjects were killed (2 Kings 25: 1 – 7; Jeremiah 40: 7 – 41: 18). But Jeremiah was shown mercy (39: 11 - 14). He was invited to Babylon, but Jeremiah chose to live in Jerusalem with the remaining people (40: 4 – 6). Judah was made a province and Gedaliah was made the Governor. However, some of the Jews killed Gedaliah (41:2). Those Jews who feared the repercussions thereof ran away to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them forcibly (43: 6, 7). Tradition says that Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt.

The stone plates during the days of Zedekiah in BC 590 unearthed in excavations reveal the correspondence between Jewish soldiers; these writings carry certain information during the period of Jeremiah.

The prophetic call and inspiration:

Like other prophets, Jeremiah too had clear conviction about his divine call and mission. He was identified for prophetic mission as early as while he was in his mother's womb similar to Samuel (1:5). He made attempts to evade the call like Moses highlighting his weaknesses, but submitted to the will of God (1:6 – 10). He received messages from God as also revelations (1: 11 – 17). His messages were for the whole universe as also to Jewish kings, Jewish Nobles, priests and all the people (1: 18, 19).

He was inspired by the lives and messages of earlier prophets. Moses and Samuel had influenced him a lot (15:1). Similarly, the prophets of 8th century and the religious insights and righteousness of Amos and Micah (6: 19, 20), divine love and mercy of Hosea (2:2; Hosea 2:14, 15), Isaiah's holiness and faithfulness to God (1:16) were all facets having great impact on the life and messages of Jeremiah. As one who stood suffering till death to carry out prophetic mission, Jeremiah is thought as the suffering servant of Jehovah (Isaiah II) and thus seen as a simile to Christ. Jeremiah had spoken through metaphors like Christ (13: 1 -11; 18: 1 – 3; 19: 1 – 27). The life of the prophet itself seems to be a metaphor. As Christ was deeply agonised, Jeremiah too underwent such experiences (John 12:27; 20: 14 – 18). As the community of priests opposed Christ, Jeremiah too was opposed by priest of his time and laughed at him; also imprisoned him and his own people made attempts to kill him (26:8; 38:4). He was put in pit of clay (38:6). In short, we have a foretaste of the passion of Christ in Jeremiah.

Message:

The prophet reminds Israel's early love and fear of God (2: 2, 3). The present day leadership have distanced from Jehovah and have been unfaithful; they are showing their piety to gentile gods; instead of relying on the might of Jehovah, they are relying on political power and have moved away from principles of ethics; Jeremiah conveyed the message of punishment from God to all such people. He further conveyed the message of redemption to those who are faithful to God. These are the key elements we see in the prophecy of Jeremiah (1:10).

Slavery:

He conveyed that the land would be destroyed and the residents would go in exile (2:14, 15; 16: 11 – 13; 17:4; 20: 5, 6; 22:10) as a result of people moving away from their early love and fear of God (2:2), breaking of the covenant with Jehovah (2: 7, 8), being unfaithful and committing the crime of being deceitful to faith (3:6 – 10) and their life filled with injustice (8:7). He proclaimed the punishment through the metaphors of jute (18), broken utensil (18) and the yoke (27). He conveyed the message of mercy, love and redemption to those who return to Jehovah and exhorted them to repent (4:1; 14:18; 26:13; 31:21).

Redemption:

He placed it in writing that there need not be any attempt to come back unless seventy years are completed in exile as this slavery was the will of God. He called upon the people to build up houses in exile leading a family life seeking goodness for the land and lead a life knowing God. He revealed that there would be redemption after that (29: 1 – 14). Since God is merciful, those who were in exile would be able to seek for God. Then, their prayers would be heard and they would be brought back that they were made to settle at their own land (29: 12 - 14; 30:3). During the days of redemption, they would have love, mercy, care and joy from God as if from a good shepherd (31: 3 – 14).

New Covenant:

People were called upon to keep in mind the covenant God had entered into with their forefathers which they should follow in letter and spirit sustaining the relation between God and his people and wait for the promise of God to materialise (11:4). God would enter into a new covenant with the community He redeemed. It would not be like the Laws and Commandments inscribed on stone plates during the time of Moses; instead, the new covenant would be inscribed on human hearts (31: 31 – 34). Jeremiah believed that human heart was the source of goodness and evil. Those who stayed away from God would have evil in their hearts and those who move closer to God would have goodness in their hearts (5:23; 17:1, 9; 23:17). Those who keep personal relations with God would be happy. A new heart is an indication of a new creation. This could be understood as a foretaste of new creation in Christ and the new covenant.

Relation with God:

The prophet stressed on an active relation being maintained with God in the new covenant. The reason is that the nature would be redeemed in the goodness of man and it would be destroyed with the evil of man (12:4). In his relation with God, man would turn to be good and do only acts of goodness. Those who do virtuous deeds would get their reward of goodness and those doing evil would have their reward also as evil (17:10). Prophet Jeremiah had a pure heart because of his relation with God; he wept over the land that had been lying bare on account of the wickedness of people which we have as the Book of 'Lamentations'.

Worship:

The relation between man and God is revealed in worship. A life that has forsaken righteousness can never be in harmony with a true worship (6: 19, 20). The essence of worship and religious traditions

comes from the personal and strongly bound relationship with God and the resultant observance of laws of righteousness and justice (2:13; 22: 3, 4). Jeremiah is the first prophet who presented a personal relationship with God.

Hope:

Jeremiah proclaimed the message not only of doom, but also that of hope (29: 4 – 14). His prophecy about the Messiah too was carrying hope. His life itself was imbedded with hope. This is the reason that strengthened him to pass through umpteen hardships in life.

A question that cropped up in his mind was the issue of divine justice. The prosperity of wicked men and the tribulations of the righteous men (12:1) have not been clarified, but a comprehensive study of the prophecy throw light to the answer. Divine justice would be implemented in the end. Evil would go through punishments and the righteous would be redeemed. The prosperity of wicked and the tribulations of the righteous are short time phenomena. Without getting wavered in this, we have to wait for divine justice. He views the exile as a punishment from God to lead His people to redemption.

Word of God:

The power behind the messages from Jeremiah was his conviction about the Word of God. He had been cherishing the thoughts that one had to rejoice and excited at the Word of God because Word of God is powerful (15: 16, 17). He succeeded to proclaim the Word without fear (1:4).

Remnant:

The prophet held thoughts of a faithful remnant. Those who serve the servant of God (27:11) and the humble, poor and faithful (39:10) would be that remnant to inherit the nation. The New Testament thought that 'Kingdom of Heaven is for the Poor' (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20) could have a bearing on Jeremiah 39:10. "He left in the land of Judah some of the poorest people, who owned no property, and he gave them vineyards and fields".

Divine Vision:

Jeremiah taught that Jehovah was the true God, the creator and protector (27:5). He picks up the example of potter and clay (18:6) to convince this. God is one who is sufficient for us to rely upon, and he is epitome of glory.

God interferes in history and guides it. This is understood from the choice of Nebuchadnezzar as a servant of God (27:6). The exile happened as the will of God; this indicates God interfering in history as and when needed.

The prophet saw a God who maintains a dynamic and active personal relationship with man in his day to day affairs. This could be the reason why he has expressed the concept of renewal of heart as also writing the Law in the heart of man.

God is righteous. He seeks justice and virtues from people. The righteous God rewards each man according to his deeds (17:10; 32:19). God evaluates man not based on external or peripheral deeds, but by examining the heart of each one. (20:12).

God is loving and merciful; He waits for sinners to change their minds (4:1; 32:19). He redeems the humble and the faithful (20:13; 39:10). Jeremiah conveyed this higher divine vision to the people and personally, he followed them in his life.

Questions:

1. What is the background of Prophet Jeremiah? Establish that he was a prophet of sufferings.
2. What are the main contents in the prophecies of Jeremiah?
3. Explain briefly the divine vision possessed by Jeremiah.

Lesson 6

Ezekiel

Background # Prophet and his Message # Divine Vision

The prophet Ezekiel lived in BC 6th century and worked among the Israelites who were under exile to Babylon.

Background:

Nebuchadnezzar overpowered Judah in BC 597 and more than ten thousand people including the king were taken to Babylon as slaves. Ezekiel was one among them (1:1). In BC 587, Babylon invaded Judah once again and destroyed the nation with which their slavery turned total. Jeremiah had called upon the people to be prepared for this exile that would last seventy years (Jeremiah 29: 1 – 14). The emigrants had religious freedom in Babylon though to a limited extent. The Jewish elders used to worship Jehovah under the leadership of Ezekiel (8:1; 20:1).

There were Jews who viewed this fall of Jerusalem as a weakness and failure of Jehovah. Thus, they got attracted to Babylonian culture and their religious rituals. Another set of Jews stood firm in Jehovah and looked forward to return to Jerusalem at the earliest and offer sacrifices at the Temple. Those Jews who continued to stay at Jerusalem during the days of exile were thought to be the faithful remnants proclaimed by the prophets and this disappointed the Jews who were in Babylon who stood for Jehovah in their adversities there. There were Jews who always believed that Jerusalem would never be destructed. It was necessary to guide and bring back those emigrants who had distanced themselves from true faith having fallen victims to false prophets and had been engaging themselves in idol worships and leaning towards gentile religious rituals as well as living a wayward style of life. The messages of Ezekiel have to be understood in this background. He worked hard to get the people prepared for a long exile while encouraging them to retain their faith in Jehovah.

Prophet and his Message:

The Prophet:

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah. He hailed from the clan of the priest Zadok as the son of Buzi and himself was a priest too apart from being a prophet. He got his prophetic call when he was staying in Babylon as emigrant (1: 1- 3). He was regarded highly by the emigrants (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). He stamped his name as a priest, as a prophet (1:3), as a shepherd, as a watchman (3:17), as a philosopher and as a visionary of God. His prophetic period is understood to be 22 years from BC 593 to 571 (1:1; 29:17). Ezekiel is considered as the man behind the renewed Jewish religion; the visions we see aplenty in the Book of Ezekiel and the experiences of ecstasy as well as metaphoric acts and the illustrations of worship are all highlighting the unequalled personality of the prophet. The word 'Ezekiel' has meanings like 'power of God' or 'God empowers'.

Priest and Prophet:

Prophets by and large had been conveying messages where justice and ethics were the subjects of importance rather than stressing on worships. They were not against religious rituals, but they opposed the senselessness of worship life where righteousness was left out and they pointed out this trait widely seen among people. Himself being a priest, he had proclaimed the nobility of priesthood and the glory of worship. What we see different in Ezekiel is that he has dovetailed priestly traditions and prophetic traditions in his messages. This has been due to his conviction in its wholeness about his priestly call and prophetic mission. The history we see in Ezekiel is a priest becoming a prophet as a divine mission. The commencement of apocalyptic literature is also seen in Ezekiel.

Message:

His messages were aimed at strengthening the people who were in exile whose self confidence had eroded completely ; they were encouraged to hold on to a life in righteousness and being faithful to God; his messages conveyed hope to the people. The house of Israel that was engaged in fights (17:5) was called to have a change of mind (18:32); those who were obedient were told about the hope of redemption. The reconstruction of Jerusalem, the city of God and the Temple that was the dwelling place of Jehovah were issues that had to be undertaken on propriety and the prophet proclaimed the importance of the Laws (41 – 48). He believed that God has appointed him as a watchman to convey these to the people (3:17).

Faith being forsaken, being unfaithful to God (16), being unholy, being unethical, engaging in idol worship (29:39) and committing murder (22:2) were all sins God hates very badly and opposes them uncompromisingly; the body that sins would die(18:4); the righteous who hates sin would live (18: 5 – 9). The reason for their present exile is an after effect of their sins (11:9); God expects purification of His children through this exile (11:16); once the process of purification is over, they would be redeemed and placed at appropriate place. To enable them to come to that, they would be provided a new heart and a new soul (10:19; 36:28); the covenant would be renewed (11:20); they would have peace and hope.

God who is the creator of this universe has His eyes on other nations also. He calls upon any nation as he pleases to execute His will. Thus, he chose Babylon to punish Israel. It should be possible to know God through historical events (20:38; 36:38).

The message of the prophet concentrated on prominence to individuals. He pointed out the importance of individual religious practices and purity in personal life. The emigrants had the view that they were suffering because of the sins committed by their fore fathers. Saying that the children had their teeth turned sour was objected by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (18:2; Jeremiah 31:29). Ezekiel taught the people that if one committed a sin, he alone was responsible for that and had to face the punishment (18:4; Jeremiah 31:3). The righteous would be redeemed. At the same time, a righteous person might be destroyed in injustice and a wicked one might survive out of justice (18: 21 – 24). He again taught about the personal life in righteousness and related responsibilities above sins of the community and thus reinstated the people in faith related to divine justice. The importance of personal relationship used to be highlighted always. The religious feeling within one's heart was stressed frequently (11:9; 12 – 16; 18:31, 33; 36:24 – 27).

Those who go on fighting with God deserve punishments. It is not necessary for us to intercede for them. Each individual has to be punished for their personal sins. The basis for redemption is personal reformation of one's mind (18: 20 ff). Only through a change of mind, one becomes acceptable to God. The prophet called upon the people to live a life of readiness to accept new heart and new soul. Ezekiel has been very frequently using the term, 'son of man' (2:1; 3:1; 4: 1; 5:1). The thought that God is creator and man is creation has been strongly imbedded in Ezekiel. If son of man is steadfast in relying on God, he would be called to join the divine mission. The term 'son of man' is used here 87 times. It is worth recalling here that Jesus Christ quite often called himself 'Son of Man'. (Note: There are certain Bible versions where the term 'mortal man' is used instead of 'son of man'.)

The prophet taught that God is the foundation of life. Man became a living being when divine breath was blown into a lifeless object (Genesis 2:7). Relation with God sustains life. He illustrates three visions to show that God is the source of life.

- a. Dried out bones coming to life (37: 1- 14)
- b. A river originating from the Temple of God (47: 1 – 12)
- c. The coming up new city (48: 30 – 35)

All these visions point out that our God has the power to provide a new life to those who were in exile; for this, one has to be in close relation with God. Distancing from God ends up in death and being in relation with Him provides life.

Ezekiel expressed hope in the renovation of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. He taught that in order to have a lively relationship with God, Temple and religious rituals are inevitable. Along with that, he stressed, like his preceding prophets, that the fruit of being in relation with God is righteousness and ethics. He also laid stress on the direction of Temple towards the East (47:1) as well as on the significance of East (11:1; 43:1, 2; 44: 1, 2; 46:1; 47:2). His directives on the arrangements within the Temple and his suggestions towards conduct of worship are worth noting (41 – 48). Here, we see the priestly insights of the prophet; he could enlighten the people about the relevance of Temple, need to worship and the observance of Laws. He has pointed out the authority of the Laws, the nobility of divine holiness and glory as well as the importance of righteousness and

ethics. He had commenced his prophecy proclaiming punishment to people who had distanced themselves from a God who was Holy and filled with Glory; but while coming to its end, the illustration is that of a community renewed and redeemed thorough the Spirit and might of God living in joy and submission to God. This inspires the readers to lead a life of hope rejoicing the experience of God's presence.

Divine Vision:

The prophet possessed a very noble vision of God. His stress was on the glory of God (1:28; 3:12), the might of God (1:4) and the holiness of God (9:6).

He has expressed his feelings about the love of God. He sees the love of God in God not liking the death of a dying man (18:32; 33:11). God out of His love looks forward to sinners to have a change of mind leading to redemption.

He had deep insights about the power of God in creation. The prophet reveals this through the gift of new heart, new soul and new life, thereby being a new creation (11:9). God, the creator is the source of life (37: 1 -14).

Ezekiel saw God as one who interferes in history and guides it (18: 4, 25 – 32). The righteous God rewards each one according to deeds of each (18:30; 33::20).

God is one who expects worship and righteousness equally. He hates unethical deeds and punishes those indulge in such deeds (18). The prophet understood in their full depth the omnipotence, the omnipresence, the wholesome wisdom, the holiness, the glory, the nobility and the lordship of God. He assimilated the divine visions of a prophet and a priest in unison. Thus, he successfully carried out his prophetic and priestly missions doing justice to both.

Questions:

1. What are the main messages from Ezekiel? What was the background of his work?
2. What are the significances Ezekiel attributes to the Temple and worship?
3. Explain the divine vision of the prophet.

Unit 4

Isaiah II to Daniel

Lesson 1

Isaiah II (40 – 55)

Background # Prophet and the Message # the Suffering Servant of Jehovah # Divine Vision

In this lesson, we will discuss the prophet who lived in BC 6th century. We are calling him Isaiah II. His true name is not known. Like Ezekiel, he is a prophet during the days of exile. We see his messages in Isaiah chapters 40 to 55.

Background:

The background of this prophecy is conveying divine messages to the immigrants tired in their life of slavery; they were being energised in hope. He carried out his prophetic mission during the reign of the Persian king Cyrus [BC 559 to 530] (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were already destroyed. People were fed up in slavery and exile. Babylon too was gradually getting weakened and the Persian Empire was assuming strength. Under such a scenario, the prophet made his entry by conveying message of hope to the people who were spending their days in utter disappointment (40:1). The message carried hope of the days of exile coming to an end that they can return to their home land. .

Prophet and the Message:

Prophet:

The Book of Isaiah doesn't provide any hint of the prophet but for the period of his mission. His message commences with words of consolation that the Persian king Cyrus would overcome Babylon and grant freedom to emigrants as he has learnt from heavenly counsel. It was in BC 538 Cyrus defeated Babylon. Thus, scholars opine that the period of prophecy would be between BC 546 and 538. He was chosen by God to pass on the messages of liberation to emigrants from their exile in the very near future. The prophet presents himself as voice of the desert exhorting (40:3) the good news of redemption (40: 3 – 11). He wished to be just a voice behind the Word of God and believed strongly that the Word would become true (55:11).

The authorship of chapters 40 to 55 of the Book of Isaiah has been a subject of controversy. But scholastic studies revealed that this was not authored by Isaiah who lived in the 8th century BC. It is believed that these chapters are possibly written by the community of disciples of the 6th century. The messages and exhortations of Isaiah I were presented with contemporary realities of the 6th century for conveying to emigrants and these parts too were considered with the Book of Isaiah. The manuscript unearthed from Dead Sea scrolls of Qumran also has chapters 1 to 66 continuously. The

inherent literary talent of the prophet is reflected in the presentation carrying poetic and dramatic expressions.

Messages:

The main topics covered are creation, history and redemption. God is the central person. The significant incidents in history such as creation, the flood during the days of Noah, call of Abraham, choice of Israel, exodus from Egypt and covenant with David are presented. Persian king Cyrus too has a significant presence in these narrations. The choice of Israel (41: 8, 9), her mission (42:6, 7; 51:10), failures (42:18 – 20), punishments and redemption (43:1 - 7) are all explained. The central point in these prophetic thoughts is the mystery of the sufferings of Israel and the divine mission behind it rather than historical events.

To begin with, the prophet conveyed messages of comfort to the emigrants (40:1, 2). In addition to messages of comfort, he encouraged them further with hope, courage and the might of Jehovah (42:3; 43:19). Exposing the senselessness of those who worship idols (40:19; 44: 9 – 19; 46: 1, 2, 5 – 7) he proclaimed that Jehovah alone was true God (46: 8 – 10). Explaining the redemption of Israel (44:23; 48:20), he proclaimed that the Persian king Cyrus had been anointed by God for that (45:1). The annihilation of Babylon too was prophesied (47). Exile was not for the ruin of Israel, but for testing them in the fire of sufferings as silver was refined in a furnace (48:10). Telling that those who knew God would be saved from enemies (54:17), he called upon Israel for a change of mind (55: 6 – 9). He proclaimed that God would announce His kingdom in Zion (51: 17 – 52:12). One was becoming eligible for redemption through holiness (43:14; 54:5). He worked to improve their standard of ethics (40:14; 51: 7, 8). The following five aspects can be summed up from the messages of the prophet.

- a. Jehovah is the creator and the Lord of history. Isaiah has highlighted earlier prophetic thoughts on this matter. He sees a new community being created by God, the creator. In his thought processes, creation and exodus are very important. The very same power of God acted in the first creation (Genesis) and the first exodus (Exodus) would act in the second creation and second exodus (51: 9 – 11). The purpose of God is purification through punishment to create a new community. The failure of the people of God is not the failure of God but the impact of their sinful life as well as realisation of prophesies. Those who had ruined Israel would turn out to be the cause for redemption. God has never forsaken Israel (50: 1, 2). The choice is not made null and void. What happened were just appropriate punishments for their distancing from God. The purpose of such punishment is nothing but redemption (48:10).
- b. Through history, we learn that Jehovah alone is God. The faith in one God that has been prevailing among Israelites is reconfirmed by the prophet. But when the people has resorted to worshiping gentile gods and doing sacrifices on idols, it has become necessary to teach them all over again about true faith (44:9 – 16).
- c. The universal view point of the prophet has to be taken note of. God who is the creator and the Lord of history is God for all nations and people (42: 1 – 6; 49:6).
- d. The people chosen by God have a responsibility to God, to the world and to other nations. Those who are chosen by God should be the Law of people and light of nations (42:6). They are the light of nations to reach redemption till the end of the world (49:6). We see this

responsibility conveyed through the words of Christ, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).

- e. Perhaps the most noble among the messages would be the glorious vision of hope reflected in the hymns of servant (42: 1 – 9; 49: 1 – 6; 50: 4 – 9; 52:13 – 53:12). What we see in the hymns of servant are not the sufferings due to sinful acts. Instead, there we have righteous sufferings (50:89) and vicarious sufferings (53:4 – 7). This prophet was well convinced of the greatness of righteous sufferings and the advantages thereof.

The Suffering Servant of Jehovah:

There are four hymns about the suffering servant of Jehovah. [(1) 42: 1 – 7 (2) 49: 1 – 6 (3) 50: 4 -9 (4) 52: 13 – 53: 12]. In the eyes of man, a servant is one who suffers, one being ridiculed, one who is weak and one who is a failure. But, in the eyes of Jehovah, servant is respected, victorious and glorified; he judges the world, he is the Law of the people and he is the light of the world; he undergoes passions and death thereby redeems the world and overcomes passion and death.

The prophet presents Cyrus who has made his entry like a tempest and then comes up with the suffering servant who makes his appearance silently but conveying hope to the people. In the first hymn, it is stated that God has given His Spirit to the servant for passing judgement of righteousness, for being Law to the people and for being light to nations (42: 1 – 7). The mission for the servant is to establish kingdom of God; for this, the servant is powered by God.

The second hymn presents the servant as one who has been chosen by God right from his birth to redeem the world, to provide light to the nations and to fight for God (49:1 – 6). The mission for the servant here is to proclaim the redemption of God using sword and arrow (49:2). The servant relies not in his might, but in the power of God (49:4). The servant would be the cause for a change of mind in Israel, for Israel to meet together and for the redemption of the whole universe.

We can see the servant waiting patiently for the word of God in the third hymn (50: 4 – 9). Despite suffering all passion and ridicule, the servant doesn't back out; he responds to the call to become a disciple of God and acts accordingly; his patience and tribulations are beyond description of words.

The fourth hymn pictures the servant's unexpected glorification though he has been ugly to view, he has been ridiculed, he has been persecuted, he has been sick and he has been weak (52: 13 – 53: 12). The tribulations and sufferings of the servant of God have been for the redemption of multitudes. The prophet, thus, inspires readers to undergo sufferings for the redemption of others.

The Book doesn't specify who this suffering servant is; this has, thus, led to lots of discussions and controversies. The Jewish tradition treats Israel as the servant of God. In other words, an ideal Israel community is pictured as a model. Readers have thought about Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and others as the suffering servant as they have all undergone tribulations aplenty; even the prophet himself as also Zerubbabel have been considered in this respect. However, Christian traditions attribute the character seen in these hymns as Jesus Christ. Jesus has pictured himself as servant whose mission has been to serve others, to suffer for others and die for redeeming the people (Mark 10:45). Christ has been glorified through tribulations (Luke 24: 25, 26). It is necessary that such servant traits should be there in each one of us.

Divine Vision:

The divine vision we have here is of a very high level. The prophet taught very strongly that Jehovah alone is the true God (43: 11, 12; 45:5, 18; 46:9). God is the epitome of Glory (40:50; God is eternal (40:28); God is incomprehensible (45:15); God is Holy (54:5). God is the creator (40:28; 43:1; 44:2; 54:5), protector (43:2; 45:15), redeemer who renews strength (40:31), loving (43:4), helper (41:10), shepherd (41:11) and comforter (40:1). He also taught that God provides hope (43:2), makes people courageous (41:10; 43:5; 44:8), guides history (45:1), punishes evil (48: 18, 19), redeems through punishment (48:10) and God is merciful and compassionate (54:8). Those who stand for God and suffer for Him are glorified. Isaiah II possessed a divine vision of such higher thoughts. It is also worth noting that the divine visions of the previous prophets are included in him comprehensively.

Questions:

1. Briefly explain about the background, message and divine vision of Isaiah II.
2. Which are the hymns of servant? What are the main thoughts coming in them? Who is the servant?

Lesson 2**Haggai, Zechariah I (1 – 8)**

Background # Prophet and the Message # Divine Vision

From here onwards, we are discussing prophets after the exile. This lesson deals with Haggai and Zechariah I who lived in BC 6th century.

Prophet Haggai:**Background:**

Cyrus subdued Babylon in BC 538 and thus, Babylon became a part of Persian Empire. With this, Palestine too merged with Persia. Cyrus allowed the Jewish emigrants in Babylon to return to their home land. The governance of Palestine was entrusted to Zerubbabel belonging to the clan of David. Those who returned from the exile lived under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua. But, as they returned to their home land, their enthusiasm to rebuild the Temple and start worshipping there turned cold. They were concentrating their efforts to build good houses for their dwelling. They had to confront calamities like scarcity, crop failure, and devaluation of currency (Haggai 1:6, 9, 10; 2:17 – 19). They found it impossible to have both ends meet despite their hard work and toiling. Under such circumstances, renovation of the Temple got neglected. It was,

therefore, necessary to energise the people to rebuild the Temple for worship as their first priority. This is the background behind the mission of Haggai.

Prophet and the Message:

The prophet has been commended in Haggai 1:1, Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. Haggai was having a divine insight that he had a mission to convey messages to those who have returned from exile. He encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple. He spoke to the ruler of the land, their priest and also to the people in general (1:1, 13). Thinking of the prophet as person, the term 'Hag' means 'festival' and therefore it is presumed that he would have born on a festival day. The word 'Haggai' means 'my festival'. He lived during the reign of Persian king Darius (527 – 486).

The Book of Haggai contains mainly four prophecies.

- a. The calamities Israel had been confronting currently was on account of their ignoring rebuilding of the Temple and that to have divine blessings, the renovation of the dwelling place of God had to be carried out as early as possible. The ruler of the land, the priest and the people woke up at these words and commenced reconstruction of the Temple (1: 1- 15).
- b. During the reconstruction, some of the people doubted the beauty of the new Temple; Haggai encouraged them saying that the new Temple would be more splendid than the old one and that all creeds of people would make their entry into it (2: 7 – 9). He made the people enthusiastic to complete the work (2:4).
- c. The sum of the third prophecy is that the lack of holiness of priests had resulted in the earth turning impure and that the earth was therefore not bearing fruit; once the rebuilding works of the Temple started, heavenly blessings would be showered on the land (2: 10 – 19).
- d. The next prophecy is about Zerubbabel (2: 20 – 23). God has chosen Zerubbabel and thorough him and through his clan, deeds of redemption would be satisfied.

Haggai earns name for waking up the people for a practical life that has its foundation in worship.

Divine Vision:

Unlike the prophets we have been discussing so far, perhaps, a divine vision is not so evident in Haggai. He has presented God as one who looks forward to His people being faithful to Him and leading a life giving priority to God, worship and matters related to spirituality.

Prophet Zechariah:

Zechariah is a prophet who lived in BC 6th century following return from the exile. Scholars have divided the Book of Zechariah into two. Chapters 1 to 8 have been authored by Zechariah who was a contemporary of Haggai. But the remaining chapters 9 to 14 are not his. Some of the thoughts seen in the first 8 chapters such as divine protection (2:5; 9:8), redemption and the era of salvation are seen in chapter 9 to 14 as well. These ideological similarities would have prompted scholars to place these chapters together with the earlier part. Let us, for the sake of convenience, call the author of the second part Zechariah II. His period is considered to be late 3rd century BC or early 2nd century.

Zechariah I (1 – 8):

Here we discuss chapters 1 to 8 from the Book of Zechariah.

Background:

Since Zechariah I is a contemporary of Haggai, the background doesn't change much (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). The prosperous future predicted by Isaiah seemed to be a good dream by the people. The reason is that after returning from the exile, people had to confront various calamities in life. They were not getting sufficient returns for their hard work. This scenario placed them in a detachment from the Temple as also from God. The rebuilding exercise of the Temple got cooled down. This situation necessitated the people to be goaded to building of the Temple as well as turning to God. This was the background where Zechariah carried out his mission.

Prophet and the Message:

Not only that Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries, they were also colleagues having similar views on issues (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Zechariah, a priest and a prophet was son of prophet Iddo. He worked at Jerusalem between BC 521 and 519. He had learnt thoroughly the teachings of forefathers and prophets (1:5, 6). His presentations of divine messages were mostly through visions like those of Ezekiel and later Daniel. Eight visions are given (1:7 – 6:8) in apocalyptic style. The personality of Zechariah contains a thirst for ethics as a prophet and the sense of true worship as a priest. As a prophet, he was quite practical minded. He worked towards rebuilding the Temple and coordinating those who serve in the Temple as also to conduct worship in a better way (1:16; 4:9; 6: 12, 13). The word 'Zechariah' means "God remembered' and 'remembering God'.

The main subject of discussion is the rebuilding of the Temple. The reason for hurrying up this is the commencement of kingdom of God (messianic era). Those are the days when people are redeemed by God and the covenant would be renewed (2:10; 8:3; 8:8). The Temple of God would be the place where you have presence of God (2:10; 8:3). He pointed out the need for a priesthood that is purified (3: 1 – 10). His messages were those of hope and courage. He conveyed to all that the Temple would be rebuilt (1:16; 4:9; 6:12), Zerubbabel would be anointed as king and Joshua as priest (6: 9 – 13), all those who were in slavery would be brought back (8: 7, 8) and prosperity and peace would return soon that there shall not be any fear complex, but let all be courageous (8: 11 – 13). Jerusalem would be called 'City of Truth'. Jehovah Himself would take care of it (2: 4, 5). Since then, the construction of the Temple got completed in five years (BC 516).

He taught the people that righteousness and ethics should move hand in hand with worship and rekindled them with the ways and means of early prophets. He advised that people should be righteous, merciful, taking care of widows and aliens, not blaming others and welcoming truth and peace (7:9, 10; 8: 16, 17; 8:9).

God pleases in virtues like righteousness, justice, compassion, mercy, truth, and peace. The thoughts of 8th century prophets about fasting were found attractive to Zechariah (7: 5 – 7). More than the observance externally and peripherally, God looks into the internal experience of one who undertakes fasting. The prophet called upon the people to be truthful and peaceful through fasting (8:19). Temple and the rituals there would be senseless in the absence of a righteous way of life. He wanted the people to repent in the very beginning (1:3). He conveyed the message of repentance reminding them of the punishments their forefathers confronted for their disobedience (1: 4 – 6).

Further, he pointed out the need of holiness along with repentance. One can be part of the people of Holy God only through holiness. God would destroy impurity and sin (5: 1 – 4). Zechariah had a vision of dirty linen of priest; this was to remind him of the sinful lives of the priests and the people (3:3). He advised them about the divine glory they would have through their change of mind and their holiness (3; 4, 5).

The understanding of the prophet about angels is worth noting (1: 9 – 11, 19; 3:1; 4:1; 5: 5; 6: 4). Prophets before exile are not seen to have said anything about angels in their messages. Then, prophets used to receive messages direct from God. From the days of exile, there came up angelic thoughts among Israelites progressively. The 'only one God faith' got affirmed and simultaneously, the conviction that God was beyond everything and that He was Glory personified and was the noblest of all was confirmed. With this they believed that God would get in touch with men who were weak and unholy through His angels only who acted intermediaries. This thought got very popular gradually. In the days between Old Testament and New Testament, these thoughts were very powerful.

There are important thoughts about Messiah and Messianic Era from Zechariah (6: 12, 13; 2: 4 – 12; 8: 3 – 8, 12, 13, 15; Mark 14:58). The thought that Jehovah would establish His sovereignty in Jerusalem has been evident through the prophetic visions. The king and the priest jointly work for peace and prosperity in the land (6:13). All nations would have space in the kingdom of God (8: 20 – 23). Messiah looks forward to the redemption and joy of the whole mankind; Messianic Era and Messianic kingdom also aim at this. The prophets expect that all the nations would make their entry to it. The message ends up with a narration of peace and joy.

Divine Vision:

The Divine Vision Zechariah possessed had been very noble. Jehovah alone is God. Jehovah is righteous (1:2), merciful (1:3, 16), one who punishes evil (1:6) and is glorified and taking care of those who fear Him (2:5). God is omnipotent. He is beyond all other powers. In His presence, He is nearby (7:10). In his Holiness and Glory, He is distanced. As such, He conveys His will through angels. He, who is righteous wants righteousness, compassion, mercy (7: 9, 10), truth and peace (8:19) from His people. Those who are faithful to Him would be redeemed and made to be with Him in His kingdom with joy. The vision of Zechariah was found to be very inspiring to the early Church.

Questions:

1. What is the main mission of Haggai? What was its background?
2. What are being revealed through the eight visions of Zechariah?
3. What are the message and divine vision of Zechariah?

Lesson 3

Isaiah III (56 – 66), Obadiah

Isaiah III (56 – 66) # Background # Prophet and the Message # Divine Vision # Obadiah # Background # Prophet and the Message # Influence of other Prophets # Divine Vision

In this lesson, we are discussing Isaiah III and Obadiah who were prophets after the exile. Their mission has been spread across BC 6th and 5th centuries.

Isaiah III (56 – 66):

Background:

The one who has authored chapters 56 to 66 in the Book of Isaiah is being called Isaiah III. The background is quite different from that of Isaiah II as now, the period is post exile. Consequent to the proclamation of Cyrus in BC 538, immigrants started returning to their home land the very next year. In the background, we have immigrants returning, preparations to reconstruct Jerusalem (60:4, 14) and efforts to make it prosperous, safe and glorified (60: 18, 19). There is worship in the Temple (60:7), but the city walls are still seen broken (60:10). Studying the scattered prophecies in the Book, it is inferred that the background of Isaiah III coming up with his prophetic mission would have been between the immigrants' return (BC 537) and entry of Nehemiah (BC 445).

Prophet and the Message:

Isaiah III would probably be a disciple of Isaiah II. In coordinating various prophetic thoughts, it is seen that Isaiah III has taken Isaiah II as model. The Book is virtually silent about the person Isaiah III. He was convinced that his divine call was to convey the message of the good news of redemption and comfort (61: 1 – 3). He carried out his mission efficiently: he woke up the ethic sense of those people who were living in desperation (58: 6 – 8); he pointed out their mistakes in life (59: 1 – 15); he conveyed the message of redemption (59:1); he described the glory of Jerusalem (60 – 62); he shared the message of hope (66:12).

Message of Redemption:

The prophecy commences with a message on redemption (56:1; 57: 18, 19). He called upon the people to make themselves eligible for the divine gift of redemption (59: 1, 2) through worship (56:7), righteousness, justice, holiness, goodness (56: 1, 2) and repentance (59: 1, 2). He pointed out their wrong doings in life (57: 3 – 13) and asked them to have a change of mind and seek comfort by relying in God (57: 13 – 15).

Essence of Fasting:

The prophet criticised their religious rituals those were absolutely senseless as they were being performed distancing themselves from God. He clarified to them that rather than the external expressions in fasting, what really mattered was the inner sense. Through fasting, one should get closer to God and be engaged in righteous deeds (58:2 – 8). The prophet exhorts, "The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chain of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor.

Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives” (58: 6, 7). The verse, ‘the kind of fasting I want’ is a thought we come across in Christ too (Isaiah 61: 1-37; Luke 4: 17 – 19; Matthew 25: 31 – 45). God is glorified through deeds of righteousness based on worship (58:8). Our good deeds make us eligible for divine glory (58: 6 – 8; 60:1). We can have the feel of presence of God through our holiness and our goodness (61; 1 – 3).

Glory of God and Faithful Remnant:

The prophet conveyed that a faithful remnant would be readied by God to proclaim the Glory of God. When we understand our weakness and acknowledge our helplessness, God comes to us with His might and help (59:16). Isaiah III described the glorified nature of Jerusalem (60 – 62). The glory of Jerusalem would be a result of faithfulness to God. Those who act in the wrong direction would be punished (63:4; 65: 11, 12). Destruction of the wicked is a divine justice. The righteous and the virtuous would rejoice; the wrong would suffer (65:13, 14). God takes care of those who are humble, those who are distressed and those who follow the Word of God (66:2). The faithful remnant is readied to reveal and glorify the name of God (66:19). The prophet winds up his mission conveying the message of hope (65:17 – 25; 66: 22 – 24).

Divine Vision:

Following the thought processes of his master, Isaiah conveyed messages from God and his divine vision was very high.

Saying that Jehovah is the only one true God, who gives us glory, the prophet cemented faith in one God (64:4). God is noble (57:15); He is glorified (63:15); He is the loving creator and the redeemer (63:16; 64:8; 65:17; 66:22). The prophet has been seeing God as one who demand holiness, righteousness, justice (56:1, 2) and goodness (58:6 – 8; 61: 1 – 3). He is a comforting God (57: 18, 19). He empowers those who are weak, humble and broken hearted (57:15; 59:16; 66:2). Those who are faithful to Him receive His light and glory (60: 19).

Shadow of Holy Trinity:

Faith in Holy Trinity is reflected in the divine vision of Isaiah III as if in a shadow. His prophecy contains mentions about God, the Father (63:16; 64:8), about the Word of God or Logos (56:1; 65:13; 66:1) and about Holy Spirit (63:10, 11, 14). There is a clear concept about the person of Holy Spirit (63:10). God is close to us in Holy Spirit (63:11). The revelation of Holy Trinity in its fullness comes in Jesus Christ; yet, though not in absolute clarity, there are hints in the Old Testament particularly in Isaiah III. All these have been basic factors formulating true Christian vision.

Obadiah:

Background:

This is a prophecy of BC 5th century. The story of the enmity between Jacob and Esau is there behind this prophecy. The hostility between Israel and Edom can also be seen. Instead of having brotherly love, Edom distanced from Israel. They joined others to destroy Israel and rejoiced at her fall. This background is there in the mind of the prophet.

Prophet and the Message:

This happens to be the shortest book in the Old Testament with just a single chapter with 21 verses. There are no clues about the prophet as also about the period of his mission. The word 'Obadiah' means 'servant of God'. This would have been authored after the destruction of Jerusalem in BC 586 and before the fall of Edom in BC 460. There are scholars who attribute the period even up to BC 400.

Message:

Mainly, there are two messages here.

- a. Verses 1 to 14 pictures the ruin of one who rejoices at the fall of another. Edom who allied with others to destroy Jerusalem and rejoiced at her fall would be ruined (1 – 15). The fruit of arrogance is doom (3, 4). The one who plan revenge on one's brother would be condemned and dishonoured (10). One should not take side with the decline of one's brother or enjoy in his troubles or blame him in his calamities or exploit his weakness (11 – 14). The first part of the message contains the condemnation of Edom who did all the above evil to Israel.
- b. The second part of the message is about the day of the Lord (15 – 21). The day of the Lord is the Day of Judgment for Jerusalem and all nations. Those who were faithful to Jehovah would rejoice whereas those who abused Him would face condemnation. There would be a remnant of redeemed community who had been faithful throughout (17). Jehovah would reign as king from Zion. Jerusalem would be glorified. And the message that the sovereignty of Jehovah would be established was conveyed (21).

Influence of other Prophets:

Influences of other prophets are evident in the messages of Obadiah. Thoughts such as the Day of the Lord (Obadiah 15; Amos 5:18; Isaiah 34:8; 63:4) and the redeemed remnant (Obadiah 17; Jeremiah 37:10; Zephaniah 3: 12, 13) have been seen in many earlier prophets also. The ideological similarity between Obadiah 1 – 10 and Jeremiah 49: 7 – 22 are quite striking. This points out to a mutual indebtedness between the two. But scholars hold a view that both these prophets would have relied on some common record elsewhere rather than being mutually indebted.

Divine Vision:

Though short in length, we see a divine vision here that is quite sharp. God hates arrogance, lack of love, and adventure but He expects humility, love, faithfulness and such other virtues from us. The faithful would be redeemed, but the unfaithful would be ruined. That is the day of God's revenge. That is the day of expression of divine justice and goodness. Impurity and wickedness have no place before God and therefore they would be annihilated.

Questions:

1. Illustrate the background, message and the divine vision of Isaiah III.
2. Obadiah is a short book, but it contains very noble thoughts. Establish this.

Lesson 4

Malachi, Zechariah II (9 – 14)

Malachi # Background # Prophet and the Message # Divine Vision # Zechariah II # Background # Prophet and the Messages # Divine Vision # Zechariah II and the New Testament

Prophecies we have in the books of Malachi and Zechariah II are those of post exile days. The words 'this is the message' we read in Malachi 1:1, Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1 in the same manner has prompted some scholars to think that these are from one prophet. Around BC 200, the canon for the books of Laws were formulated and the books of prophets were systematised; to ensure that the number of prophetic books are confined to twelve, Zechariah II was joined to Zechariah I and Malachi was kept as a separate one, as inferred by most scholars.

Malachi:

Background:

After their return from exile, the people of Israel had to confront many calamities in life which prompted them to doubt the truth behind the love of God (1:2; 3:14, 15). Unfaithfulness and malice increased (3:5). Even their priests distanced from God and made the Temple malignant (1:7, 8 and 14). Carelessness in worship caused erosion of ethics. Divorces became very common. Inter faith marriages increased. Worshipping gentile gods became popular. Injustice, immorality, exploitation and persecution turned rampant (3:5). The messages of Malachi come in this background.

Prophet and the Message:

The book doesn't point out anything about the author. In verse 3:1, there is a mention, 'my messenger'; its Hebrew equivalent is 'Malachi'. This has been titled in 1:1. In short, there is no information about the author. Later, the authorship has been credited to Ezra as we see in the Aramaic translation of Old Testament known as Targum. What we seen in the book as background are the days after the Temple construction being completed and the days before the religious reformation being carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah. Therefore, this would have been written by mid 5th century BC. However, as a winding up of the prophecy, the verses 4: 4 – 6 would have been added later. The prophet who had a very sharp national and religious sense would have been a priest.

Message:

The message is recorded in a question and answer format (1:2, 7; 3:2, 8). The prophet gave importance to the Temple, worship and priesthood; he raised his voice against the malicious tendencies prevailed.

- a. He admonished those who doubted the love of God and those who had forsaken love of God and honour of God; he affirmed that God always loved. (1: 1 – 5).
- b. Those who dishonour God would be abused. He raised his voice against those who ridiculed God and neglected the Temple and worship by making them malignant (1: 6 – 2:9). He conveyed that when God's own people dishonoured Him, other nations respected Him (1:11). Those priests who abused God would themselves be abused.

- c. Yet another message was against divorces, worshipping of gentile gods and inter faith marriages (2: 10 – 16). People even in their early days discarded their wives and married other gentile women who were more beautiful. Consequently, they started worshipping their gods. All these deeds were the results of their unfaithfulness to God and therefore they had to undergo punishments.
- d. Verses 2: 17 – 4:6 contain message of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord would be the Day of Judgment (2:17). Those who have distanced from God would have fear, despair and punishments (3:5); those who have fear of God would be filled with hope (4:2). That day would see the true worship (3: 3, 4). He commanded the people to return to God be blessed by offering tithe and sacrifices (3: 7 – 12). The verse about tithe is remarkable: “Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple, so that there will be plenty of food there. Put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things” (3:10).
- e. Serving of God would never go in vain. The righteous would be honoured. They would be rewarded. They would be an asset for God and their names would be added to the book of memory; thus the prophet comforted them (3: 13 – 18).
- f. As a prelude to Eschaton, Prophet Elijah would come from God. Opportunity would be given for repentance. The Laws of Moses would have to be followed by all (4:4). God redeems those who coexist in peace among themselves (4: 5, 6). Christ has witnessed that John, the Baptist is Elijah as prophesied by Malachi (Matthew 11: 14).

Divine Vision:

We have a highly noble and very vast divine vision in Malachi.

- God is love (1:2). But God abuses those who abuse Him (2:9) and He is one who would not accept the worship of those who have distanced themselves from Him (2:10).
- God is God of all. Malachi possesses a universal stance about God. God is the creator and Father of all (2:10).
- God sends his messengers in advance to set right the divine path (3:1). God provides opportunities for repentance (4: 5, 6).
- God passes judgment in righteousness. He ruins evil. His fruit for goodness is redemption (4: 1, 2). It is presumed that Malachi was the one who opened the path for the good works carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah.

Zechariah II (9 – 14):

Background:

We can understand the background behind this prophecy from the book itself which would have been written towards the end of BC 3rd century or early 2nd century. That used to be the days when Jews hated gentiles and looked forward to their ruin (9: 1 – 8, 13 – 15). The people who were fed up with worldly governance waited for the Messianic era (9: 9, 10; 14:3). The Greek invasion and their

dominant culture caused a fear complex among Jews about the Greek (9:13). There are scholars who think these in relation to Maccabeus.

Prophet and the Message:

There is nothing in the book about the prophet. He looks like an anonymous one. Towards the end of his prophecy there comes up an apocalyptic style (13: 4 – 6) prompting scholars to count him among apocalyptic prophets. Malachi 1:1, Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1 are all considered to be written by the same person as mentioned earlier in this lesson. Whatever may be that, the prophet was very sharp in his Jewish religious practices and was very eagerly awaiting the coming of the Messiah. He had been very enthusiastic to reveal divine instincts (the day of the Lord) in the light of historical happenings (invasion of Alexander).

Message:

Eschaton, Messianic era, Messianic reign, faithful remnant, true worship are all matters covered mainly in the messages of Zechariah II. He has given lots of importance to Eschaton narrations. Jehovah comes to judge the world when evil would be destroyed and goodness would be protected. He will redeem His people from their enemies (9: 1 – 8). God's anointed one would come as the redeemer (9: 9, 10). He would be meek and humble, redeemer and king.

The prophet came up with the thought that divine blessings are not confined in material wealth (11:5). He has told that experiencing redemption of God is true blessing (11:6).

The prophet has highlighted about the mission of shepherds. Irresponsible way of life of shepherds and leaders would pave way for their ruin. "That worthless shepherd is doomed! He has abandoned his flock" (11:15 – 17). He called upon the people to carry out responsibly whatever tasks are assigned to them.

Further, he conveyed messages of victory of Jerusalem and victory of God (12 – 14). That day, a faithful remnant would be made ready. They would be redeemed through the tests of suffering. They would be the people of God keeping the covenant (13: 7 – 9). The Prophet had understood the significance of sufferings. The narration of the servant of God who was beaten up at his friend's house and thus being persecuted is a striking one. With the proclamation of God's victory, true worship would take place at Jerusalem (14). The wish of Zechariah I to have seen worship being done at the rebuilt Temple of Jerusalem is understood to have been satisfied.

Divine Vision:

Zechariah had a clear cut view point about God. God is one (14:0); God is the creator (12:1) and redeemer (9:8); God empowers (12:5) and purifies (13:1); God provides hope to His people (9:9). God who keeps relationship with man expects a responsible life from man. He wants absolute faithfulness (11: 15 – 17).

Zechariah II and the New Testament:

This book is one that has highly influenced the early Christians. Many of the word usages here have been reproduced in the New Testament in relation to Jesus Christ. They are:

- ❖ The entry of Christ to Jerusalem (9: 9, 10)
- ❖ Betrayal by Judas (11: 12, 13; Matthew 26: 14 – 16)
- ❖ “They will look at the one they have pierced” (12:10; John 19:37)
- ❖ He was beaten up at his friend’s house (13:6; Luke 22: 46, 47)

In short, this book is one that is very valuable to the Christian Church.

Questions:

1. What are the background, message and the divine vision of Malachi?
2. What is core message of Zechariah? Substantiate that this is a book that is very much interesting to Christian Church.

Lesson 5

Joel, Jonah

#Joel # Background # Prophet and the Message # Divine Vision # Jonah # Background # Prophet # Prophetic Message # Divine Vision #

The books of Joel and Jonah are understood to be prophecies authored during BC 4th century. Though the book of Jonah was written in the 4th century, it is based on ancient traditional events.

Joel:

Background:

Insects like locusts, grasshoppers and the like destroyed the crops; there was a severe drought in the land; these followed economic recession and poverty. They were not getting grains and wine to perform sacrifices at the Temple. As such, sacrifice offerings abruptly ended (1:4, 9 and 13). They were to confront invasions from enemies (1:6). Under such a background, all the people gathered at the Temple seeking God’s mercy; they fasted and prayed. This prophecy encourages people to turn to God (1:14). The period of the prophecy is BC 4th century. There are mentions in the book about the Greek governance of Israel (3:6).

Prophet and the Message:

From the book, we learn that Joel is the son of Pethuel (1:1). It is also learnt that he would be a Jew from his deep interest on Jerusalem and Judah (3:20). It is also presumed that apart from being a prophet, he was also a priest as we observe his active interest towards the Temple, priesthood and sacrificial rituals. The prophet was more concerned about Jews; he was certainly a core Jewish religious practitioner. The word ‘Joel’ means ‘Jehovah is God’.

Message:

His message constitutes the call to those who have been facing sufferings to repent as they were away from God and exhortations about Eschaton and the Day of the Lord.

Repentance:

Failure of crops, drought and poverty are the after effects of the people leading a life distancing them from God. So the prophet called upon the people to repent and turn to God so that God would show compassion on them (1:8, 13). They were asked to assemble at the Temple and fast as a pointer to their repentance (1:14; 2: 12, 15). He compelled them to repent because the day of the Lord was very close which would be quite a hard day (2:11). Repentance should be sincere and true; it should not be peripheral and not for a self satisfaction to be an external show off. The repentance should be with a broken heart (2:13). He spoke to them about God who was merciful towards those who repented (2:13). All the people right from infants to the elderly ones responded to the call to cry out while fasting and become purified.

Intercession:

The prophet held a view that the priests were expected to stand before God to offer intercession for the people and for them also. The priests acknowledged this call and they cried out before the Lord and sought intercession for the people (2:17). The interceding prayers of priests are always very useful. He told them that the intercession of the priests and the repentance of the people would prompt God to show them His mercy (2: 18 – 27). Jehovah alone is the true God (2:270. He also called upon them to be courageous with the presence of God (2: 20, 21).

Eschaton Thoughts and Gifting Spirit of God:

The message of the prophet has another important aspect of Eschaton thoughts. He has been telling about of the Day of the Lord, which is big and tough. It is very difficult to bear the effects thereof (2:11). That is the Day of Judgment (2: 2, 14). Those who are away from God would be punished and those who are living knowing God would be redeemed. All those who know God would be gifted Spirit of God (2: 28 – 32). This happened on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 16 – 21). Thus a remnant would be there who knows God and glorify God; this would be a redeemed community (2: 32).

Healing of the People of God, their Victory, Redemption and the Stream of water flowing from the Temple:

Those who are waging a Holy war are promised victory. God would dwell with those who lead a holy life (3: 3 – 16). God would destroy the enemies of the people of God (3:19). Judah and Jerusalem would be reinstated. Those who lead a life of holiness in relation with the Temple of God life would be gifted healing water of life. "A stream will flow from the Temple of God" (3:18). Zechariah too had witnessed about the stream of sin and malice (Zechariah 13:1). Ezekiel had prophesied about a stream from the Temple of God that was life giving and healing (Ezekiel 47:1 – 12). Isaiah had prophesied about water that satisfies one's thirst (Isaiah 55:1). All these prophecies are seen to have realised in Christ (John 4:10, 15; 13: 8; 19: 34). Our fathers teach all these are a shadow of Holy Qurbana. Once the people of God purify themselves, God would forgive their sins and would dwell in them; He would shower on them blessings of joy and hope. Conveying these types of messages, Prophet Joel inspired the people to forget their sufferings of the present and feel comfortable.

Divine Vision:

The divine vision of Joel seems to be universal in nature and very vast and noble. He has cemented the faith in one true God (3:27). God punishes evil and take revenge on the wicked (1:5; 3:19). The prophet introduces God as one who listens to the lamenting people (1:14). God passes judgment of justice (2:1; 3:14). At the same time He longs for the change of mind in man and his redemption (2:12). God is one who possesses grace, mercy, long patience and great compassion (2:13). The prophet sees God who gifts Spirit without looking into age difference or difference in status or difference in gender (3:28, 29). God takes care of those who are of saintly nature and forgives their sins (3:21).

Jonah:

Background:

Nineveh was a very important city of Assyria in the 8th century BC and was the capital. In Nineveh, wickedness increased and immorality grew (1:2). In order that the people of Nineveh are not destroyed, message of repentance was conveyed to them and they changed their mind; as result, the city was redeemed.

Prophet:

It is believed that Noah was the son of Amittai. In 2 Kings 14:25, during the days of Jeroboam II, there is a mention of Jonah, son of Amittai. If these are the same, Jonah should be a contemporary of Amos who lived in the 8th century BC. Nineveh was an important city then. But historically, there is no evidence that Jonah had visited Nineveh then and conveyed any message. Though Jonah and Nineveh point to 8th century BC, the Book of Jonah is acknowledged as one of the 4th century BC as scholars concur. Now, what is generally accepted is that the Book of Jonah is a Prophetic Novel authored to establish certain truths in the light of some old historical events and traditions as also myths being put together. Jonah is a historical person; Nineveh is a historical city. But the events recorded in the Book of Jonah should be seen apart from historical relevance, but for the lessons conveyed.

Prophetic Novel:

Evil grew rampant in the big city of Nineveh. Jehovah commanded Noah to deliver messages to the people of Nineveh that they have a change of their mind (1: 1, 2). But Noah did not heed to the command; instead, he boarded a ship to Tarshish exactly in the opposite direction. Mid way the sail, there occurred a terrific sea storm and the ship was feared to be destructed (1: 4 – 11). The seamen threw out their cargo to reduce the weight (1:5). However, Jonah realised what was happening and as directed by him, the seamen threw him out of the ship into deep sea (1: 12 – 15). A huge whale pre arranged by Jehovah swallowed Noah and he was inside the whale three days (1:17). Jonah cried out inside the whale. The whale moved to the shore and vomited him on the third day (2). Jehovah once again commanded Noah; he went to Nineveh and delivered the message of repentance and change of mind. He proclaimed that Nineveh would be annihilated unless there is a change of mind and total repentance within 40 days. Hearing this strong message, their king, the people, all their animals and all their living creatures prayed in tears fasting for 40 days. Jehovah pleased with their fasting and repentance saved them from destruction (3). Here, human thoughts started ruling over

Jonah. Having not seen the annihilation of Nineveh, he wanted to die (4:3). But Jehovah made a castor plant grow near Noah to provide him shade. When this plant faded away, Noah got disturbed and was angry. Tired and disappointed, he awaited his death (4:8). But Jehovah taught a truth to Jonah from this castor plant. Just like Jonah wanted the castor plant not to dry out, Jehovah wanted the people of Nineveh and their animals not to be destroyed; thus, the people were redeemed through their repentance (4: 10 – 11). This truth Jonah learnt from the Nineveh episode.

This incident is believed to be a prophetic novel formulated to teach certain lasting truths to the people. Jonah and Nineveh are taken from history; the whale and the castor plant are taken from mythical traditions; to these, the universal concept of redeeming the entire nations, the history of Elijah whose wish die and his wait for it (1 Kings 19: 4 – 8), Nahum's narration of Nineveh, the fasting illustrated by Joel, all taken from prophetic history have been combined together. This is an invaluable book of the Old Testament. The messages are highly noble and the divine vision is very vast.

Message:

There are very valuable facts we have here to learn:

- a. God would punish a land totally when malice and wickedness are rampant in the community.
- b. God would provide a chance to repent; if that chance is not neglected, redemption is possible.
- c. No one can stay away from a call of God; if a call is evaded, that would lead to ruin; it is better to repent and return.
- d. God will save destructions if there is repentance through fasting and prayers in full sincerity.
- e. All nations belong to God. God wants all nations to be redeemed. This story brings out insights that redemption is exclusive for Jews is not a thought in the right perspective. The Book of Ruth too covers this concept. Love of God is not earmarked to Israel alone; it is for all people. Redemption is not for one community; it is for all those who follow the word of God. God would not ruin one who is ignorant. But chances would be given that everyone comes to know the truth; one should not neglect such chances.

Divine Vision:

This book contains the universal outlook of God. God is one. He is the God of all and he redeems all those who repent. The author of this book has understood well the unparalleled love of God and His will to redeem the whole creation; this devotional writer is one who stands at a high pedestal of Old Testament visions of divinity. This book authored to change the Jews from their attitudes of cruelty to other nations and people is an invaluable volume.

Questions:

1. What are the background, message and divine vision of Prophet Joel? What is the importance of interceding prayers of priests?
2. What is the historic element in the book of Jonah? What are the message and divine vision contained therein?

Lesson 6

Daniel

Book Of Daniel # Prophecy or Revelation # Difference between Prophecy and Revelation # Background of the book # Daniel # Message # Divine Vision#

Book of Daniel:

Prophecy or Revelation:

Jewish canon has not included the Book of Daniel with prophecies, but among writings. However, Septuagint has placed it along with prophecies. The Hebrew prophetic canon has taken shape by BC 200. The prophecies in Israel have come to end by around BC 4th century. Thereafter, 400 years up to the 1st century after Christ saw the formulation apocalyptic literature as a continuation of prophecies. The Book of Daniel that was authored in BC 2nd century belongs to apocalyptic literature. The meaning of Greek word '*Apocalyptician*' means 'reveal'. Wisdom literature also came up during this period. The Book of Job is an example for this. In both these categories, what the author has to say is presented in the name of great men of the past.

Differences between revelation and prophecy:

Though apocalyptic literature has been formed from prophetic writings, there are differences between the two.

- (1) The prophets conveyed divine messages as theirs. They have owned up the responsibility of their revelations from God, Therefore, usually, from the prophecies, we can come to know about who the author is. But apocalyptic writers would not reveal their names. The matter appears in the name of great men of the past in some sort of code language, which is called symbolic cryptic language. There are two reasons for this. One, presentation of matter through popular men of the past earns recognition from the public; two, names were not revealed because the writings were during the days of religious persecution and often against the then government – but more than the fear on life, they had to fight with religious spirit.
- (2) Prophets would have occasionally revealed future events, but more than that, they were exhorting people interpreting deeds of God based on historical events and cotemporary scenarios. The apocalyptic writers were not giving any importance to current events of history. They were also not carrying hopes for the present. They were mainly conveying the hope that God would interfere miraculously in the future. Prophets proclaimed tasks for the present and promises for the future. Apocalyptic writers conveyed future events with all minute specifications of time and space (Daniel 12:12).
- (3) There are differences in the language pattern. Prophets have been presenting matters plainly though they would have occasionally used symbolic language and figurative language. When prophets said 'Jehovah said so', apocalyptic writers said, 'I saw, I heard'. They used symbolic language and cryptic language very often. There are animals and numbers aplenty to suggest events or persons (Daniel 7:3) in apocalyptic writings. The

prophetic language was comprehensible to all people, but apocalyptic language could be understood by only those to whom it was addressed. Therefore, interpretations by any one as he chooses would lead to confusion and error prone inferences. There is only one apocalyptic text in the New Testament which is the Book of Revelations by John. If anybody can interpret as one pleases, there are chances that wrong and erroneous meanings would come out. Therefore, the Church has restricted its free use. The reason for this restriction is due to difficulties in unveiling the cryptic language. Yet, other parts are quite useful to the faithful.

Background of the text:

The period of the Book of Daniel is BC 2nd century. This was authored during the religious persecutions of Jews by Antiochus Eppippanus and the under the scenario of overpowering Greek culture. Eppippanus ruled from BC 171 to 165. Period of persecution was BC 168 to 165.

The background of this book is the confrontation between Jews and gentiles. Alexander, who captured Palestine in BC 332, was the apostle of Greek culture. After his death, the empire was divided between the key persons of the armed forces. In BC 175, Eppippanus took over the reins of the land with Antioch of Syria as his capital. Eppippanus took initiatives to force the Greek culture all over his territory. His strong and black hand came over the Jews too. Those Jews who resisted this were very cruelly persecuted. He ruined their Temple and offered sacrifice using a pig, thereby desecrating the sanctity of the Temple. This is defined as 'emptying desecration'. The history of Maccabeus narrates the story of the hard fought battles to preserve Jewish culture and Jewish religious faith. The background of the Book of Daniel is the encouragement for carrying out this fight strongly.

Daniel:

The book appears in the name of Daniel, but Daniel was one who lived in BC 6th century. He was one among those Jews taken to Babylon in exile. One Daniel is mentioned in 1 Chronicle 3:1 and Ezra 8:2. There are many heroic stories about Daniel in Jewish tradition. Such narrations help the readers to have revelations of the might of Jehovah, the true God and the wisdom we have when we rely on our true God.

It is understood that this Book of Daniel has been authored by a God fearing Jewish teacher living in BC 2nd century coordinating all such stories about Daniel so that the readers would be empowered during their religious persecutions and to make them feel comfortable that they have a true God who is the epitome of might and glory. There is no information about the author anywhere in the book. The background just helps us to arrive at the time when book being written.

Message:

The authorship is not a serious issue, but the content of his message is. The message was very relevant during the time it was delivered; it is equally relevant this day also and would continue to be so for the future.

The first six chapters are based on the experience Daniel and his friends had at the palace of Babylon. God strengthened them to keep the Laws. God is strong enough to save his people from

burning furnace and lion's den. God provides knowledge, wisdom, honour, glory and authority to those who fear Him (2: 4, 5). Those who follow His Laws would be protected by Him.

Four visions are the central theme we see in chapters 7 to 11. The meanings of these visions are the growth and decline of empires and the ultimate victory of kingdom of God. These portions have symbolic expressions and cryptic languages. There are four animals in chapter 7 namely lion, bear, leopard and a fearsome beast. These symbolises Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece respectively. The fearsome beast has ten horns which are ten kings. The small horn denotes the persecutor and arrogant Antiochus Eppippanus. God would judge all these empires and destruct them. Kingdom of God would be established above them in all its might and the people of God would be honoured and rewarded. The prayer of repentance of Daniel we see in chapter 9 is a good model that can be followed by anyone. (9: 4 – 19). Daniel prayed for his own sins and also for the people of Israel (9:20). We see here the significance of prayers of intercession which is one among the main prophetic functions. Also, we see here Daniel more as a prophet rather than one who 'reveals' things. Chapter 12 is also very important. This is an ancient Old Testament textual portion that explains about life after death. The end of suffering and passion would be glory and there would be a resurrection for judgment. All the departed would resurrect. Those who have been good would earn eternal life and the wicked would have eternal punishment (12: 2, 13).

In the book of Daniel, there a few more portions which are not accepted by reformation Churches; these are provided in the deuterocanonical books. These are three stories related to Daniel and added as annexure to the Book of Daniel in Greek version.

Songs of three boys:

These are added between verses 3: 23 and 24. The theme is the three boys whom Jehovah saved from the furnace glorifying and praising the Almighty God. These have some similarities with Psalms 103 and 148. This reveals that God is Omnipotent who saves His people.

Daniel and Susanna:

Susanna was a very noble lady and a faithful wife. But she was attributed charges of adultery by two Jewish men out of their lust. She was put on trial and the wise Daniel examined her. He understood the truth. And he finds out a way to save her from her dishonour. This is the sum and substance of the story. God provides wisdom and knowledge to his people and saves those who have fear on Him from punishment.

Daniel, Baal and the Serpent:

Daniel proves in these stories that Baal and the great serpent are not gods. He ascertains that Jehovah alone is the true God. These stories were written with a view to expose the meaninglessness of idol worship.

Divine Vision:

Though simple, the divine vision we have in the Book of Daniel is very deep. The stress is on 'one God'. Jehovah alone is the true God. The divine vision that rewards those who suffer for God transpires hope to all those who are undergoing one suffering or another. God places His might

above all other powers. He passes on divine wisdom to His people and enables them to reveal mysteries. The reward need not be at this world; if so, the chances of such reward would at resurrection. God resurrects all at the time of judgment (12:2, 13).

Daniel qualifies God as Heavenly God (2:18), Great God (2:45), God of the High (4:2), Living God (6:20) and so on. God acts through His messengers who are the intermediaries (3:28; 6:22). He is compassionate when people repent (9:20). He is worshipped by all nations and creeds (7:13, 14).

Position of this Book in the Christian Church:

The Book of Daniel is treated very valuable in the Christian Church. This book had been a solace and source of strength to the early Church during their days of persecution. There are many thoughts here developed between the Old Testament and New Testament period. These are seen in Christian tradition too. Son of Man (Daniel 7:13; Matthew 20:64) and emptying desecration (Daniel 11:13; Mark 13:14) are all popular in Christian traditions. This enabled to understand that the power of this world cannot stand before the Fear of God. The basis of Christian thoughts on messengers (6:2), resurrection (12:2) and rewards after death (12:13) are seen in this book.

Questions:

1. What is the speciality of apocalyptic literature? How these are different from prophecies?
2. What are the background, message and divine vision of the Book of Daniel?

