

SECTIONS AND READINGS FOR TRAIL V

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Section V.27	2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28:1-27 & 2 Kings 17:1-41.
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Section V.38	Isaiah 17:1-19:25.
Section V.39	Isaiah 20:1-23:18.
Section V.40	Micah 1:1-2:13.
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THE DIVIDED KINGDOM ERA

1 KINGS 12-22- 2 KINGS 1-18-2 CHRONICLES 10-31; JOEL; JONAH; AMOS; HOSEA;
ISAIAH 1-23. MICAH.

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION:

What is involved in idolatry, that Yahweh should detest it so much? How can his people guard against serving idols even today?

INTRODUCTION TO 1 & 2 KINGS.

The two books of kings form a single unit in the Hebrew Bible in the Former Prophets section. The present somewhat arbitrary division originated in the 3rd century BC Greek LXX translation and was followed in Jerome's Latin Vulgate in 400 AD. They give an account of the complete history of the kings and kingdoms following David's reign. The account bears the marks of a single author using as his sources various more contemporary documents including prophetic memories. The whole is written from a religious and prophetic point of view, not from that of a secular historian. Therefore, certain of the kings, most important to their Ancient Near Eastern contemporaries, e.g., Omri, Uzziah [Azariah], and Jeroboam 11, are passed over in virtual silence, while two periods of religious crisis for God's people, the reigns of Ahab in Israel [the north] and Hezekiah in Judah [the south], are treated at much greater length.

The books' common theme is that Israel [both Israel and Judah] as the redeemed people of King Yahweh, bears his name and her kings are his representatives. Thus, a wicked king is a paradox as well as historically evil, and a good king's righteous acts reveal the reign of Yahweh himself. Prophetic activity is generally most prominent in the reigns of wicked kings. The sins of the people, both in the north and the south, lead to captivities. Political incidents are judged to be the effects of the fidelity or infidelity of God's people.

ANALYSIS OF 1 & 2 KINGS:

1K	1:1-2:12	The last days of David.	The United Kingdom of Israel continues. The Divided Kingdoms of Judah and Israel [HTB V]
	2:13-11:43	The reign of Solomon.	
	12:1-14:31	The division of the Kingdom.	
	15:1-16:28	The wars between Israel and Judah.	
	16:29 – 2 K 1:18	The Elijah cycle.	
2K	2:1 – 10:36	The Elisha cycle	The Kingdom of Judah [HTB VI]
	11:1 – 17:41	From Jehu's revolt to the fall of Samaria	
	18:1 – 23:30	Juda and the Assyrian Empire	
	22:1 – 23:30	The reforms of Josiah	
	23:31 – 25:30	The last days of Judah.	

INTRODUCTION TO 1 & 2 CHRONICLES.

The two books of Chronicles, originally one whole, were composed much later than the books of Samuel and Kings, which are frequently quoted in Chronicles along with other lost historical sources. The literary style is similar to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which also come from the early post-exilic period, perhaps even from the same author(s). The books of Chronicles are placed last in the Writings, the last section of the Hebrew Bible, and are, thus, widely separated from the earlier historical books, like Samuel and Kings, in the second section of the Hebrew Bible, the Former Prophets. But in the 3rd century Greek LXX (Septuagint) translation, Chronicles is divided into two and placed in the historical section right after the four books of Kings [i.e., 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings] and before Ezra and Nehemiah. Our English order of books derives from the LXX., but the name "Chronicles" comes from Jerome's Latin Vulgate version of 400 A.D.

The theme of the books is the centrality of Yahweh in the life of the nation, for he alone is their true sovereign. Hence, greatest emphasis is placed upon the many times in the history of the monarchy when the nation turned away from Yahweh and the few occasions of national reformation of true Yahwehist religion. The focus on Yahweh's rule naturally leads to interests in God's direct activity in history, patterns of divine retribution, scriptural authority and the centrality of the temple worship. Nevertheless, there is also a great interest in individuals and their place in the nation and the divine economy.

In spite of the clear interest in priestly matters and details of the temple worship, the witness of Yahweh's prophets to God's truth when kings and even priests corrupted, it is singled out repeatedly. The prophets viewed the division of David's kingdom into Judah [in the south] and Israel [in the north and east] as a great disaster. Written after the beginning of the restoration of Judah in the post-exilic period, Chronicles focuses almost exclusively on the Kingdom of Judah, after celebrating the glories of the golden age of David and Solomon is treated at length. Israel's future hope, however, is not grounded in the revival of the monarchy, even a Davidic one, but in a return to the obedient worship called for by Yahweh's faithful prophets. The virtues of obedient kings are dwelt upon while their vices are ignored. David, therefore, seems like a saint and comes close to replacing Moses as Israel's greatest religious patron.

Such a theological history is highly interpretive. Nevertheless, even where it ventures beyond the sources of Samuel and Kings, it has proven to be accurate archaeologically whenever it has been able to be tested. One of the most striking differences from Samuel and Kings is in its numbers. No uniform pattern has yet been discerned in these differences. Interpreting numbers is, of course, a general problem in Ancient Near Eastern studies, at least for modern, statistically-minded westerners.

ANALYSIS OF 1 & 2 CHRONICLES:

1 Ch	1 – 9	Genealogies from Adam to the Exile.	The United Kingdom [HTB IV]
	10 – 29	The reign of David	
2 Ch	1 – 9	The reign of Solomon	The Divided Kingdoms [HTB V] The Kingdom of Judah {HTB VI]
	10 - 36	The reigns of David's descendants in the Kingdom of Judah from the division of the United Kingdom down to its Exile.	

1. Besides Shechem's advantageous location near the southern border of Manasseh, between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim at a critical E-W cross roads on the central N-S road [check a map], what also made it, both politically and traditionally, a wiser site for Rehoboam to choose for his coronation, than either David's coronation site in Hebron, the traditional capital of Judah, or even Solomon's one in Jerusalem, the City of David, the tribally-neutral capital of the united Israel (Gn 12:6f, 33:18-20; 35:1-4; Js 8:30-35; 17:7; 20:7; 21:21; 24:1-28, 32)? What lessons could Rehoboam also have learned from the similar situation in Schechem described in Jg 9?
2. What happened at the coronation? How did Rehoboam's actions show what leadership style he was choosing? What psychological factors may help explain why he rejected the counsel his father's elders and followed that of his contemporaries? Does 2 Ch 13:6f throw more light on this? How close to the advice of the elders was Jesus' view of Christian leadership (Mt 5:43-45; 20:25-28; Mk 9:33-37; 10:42-45; Jn 13:14-17; 15:12-15)? Does this model really inspire service (1 Jn 4:19; Ep 4:16; 5:1f; 2 Co 5:15)? As taught and embodied by Jesus, what does this leadership model reveal about God's character and sovereignty? What huge implications are there for appropriate leadership in Christian congregations and families (1 P 5:1-6; 3:7; Ep 5:21-6:4)? What, however, might we learn from what resulted from Jeroboam's preferred leadership style? Yet, how did this outcome accord with Yahweh's will? What might that imply about how Yahweh works even through bad human choices (Ro 8:28)?
3. What inter-tribal and intra-familial rivalries show up in the Israelites' response to Rehoboam (1 K 12:16; 2 Ch 10:16)? How did his insensitive choice of a mediator only make matters worse (2 S 20:24; 1 K 4:6; 5:13f; 11:28)? What might Rehoboam's second strategy (1 K 12:21; 2 Ch 11:1) have accomplished? What prevented civil war? What does this indicate about Rehoboam?
4. What attractive characteristics of Jeroboam made him the natural choice of the northern tribes as their leader (1 K 11:26-28, 12:2f, 12, 20)? Although the prophet's words and actions occurred when he and Jeroboam were alone (1 K 11:29), what evidence is there that others had found out what had happened (1 K 11:40)? Do you think this information influenced the Israelites' choice of him as their new king? How similar are leadership choices made today by nations, businesses and congregations? How often do Christians seek or take into account a word from God?
5. What roles did prophets play in Yahweh's political economy then (1 K 11:29-39; 12:15, 23f; 2 Ch 10:15; 11:2-4)? Who are Yahweh's prophets today? What role do they play? What signs of Yahweh's hand in history have you witnessed in your lifetime?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 2: 1 Kings 12:25-14:20. -

1. What did Jeroboam do to consolidate his political grip on Israel's northern tribes (1 K 12:25, 28, 31-33)? What were his political purposes (12:26)? Why did he pick the middle of the 8th month for his new Israelite festival for Yahweh [see the chart of Annual Jewish Festivals in the Old Testament at HTB II.21] Why might it have been possible for the northern Israelites still to worship Yahweh faithfully outside of Jerusalem (1 K 3:2-5)? Where did Jeroboam get his ideas for religious change (Ex 32:4; 1 K 7:25; 12:28f; 32f)? How similar are the sources for our religious innovations today? How does Yahweh evaluate religious progress? What further actions of Jeroboam made traditional faith in Yahweh nearly impossible thereafter in Israel (1 K 12:31; 13:33f; 14:9; 2 Ch 11:14f; 13:81)?
2. What purpose does the story of the two prophets serve (1 K 13)? Where was the "man of God" from? What was his message and signs? How did Jeroboam respond? What did the "old prophet" from Bethel hear from his sons? What might have motivated him to invite the man of God to his home (Lk 23:8), even to the extent of lying? Despite the original rivalry between the two prophets, how did the old prophet's attitude change (1 K 13:26,29-31)? What was the significant result (1 K 13:32f, Jn 12:37)? What does this indicate about the kinds of people Yahweh employs in his service? Could he use even you? How?
3. Why do you think the very specific reference in 13:2 by name to king Josiah, a king of Judah who lived three hundred years later, has led some biblical scholars to view this prophecy as a reading back from the event recorded in 2 K 23:15-18? Are they fully justified in this judgement? What alternative explanations might there be for such a specific reference
4. How did the prophet Ahijah carry out his commissions from Yahweh to Jeroboam (11:29-32; 12:15; 14:5-10)? How well did Jeroboam do his part? In both instances, what were the results (12:3f; 15f; 14:14-16)? Why do you think Jeroboam didn't take the prophet's warning seriously? Would you have? Why?
5. Why was the illness of Jeroboam's son, Abijah ([Heb = "my father is Yahweh"] 14:1), so disastrous at this point (11:38)? What words and behaviours indicate that Jeroboam still believed in Yahweh, if not wholeheartedly? Who do you think it was who arranged to have Jeroboam's favourite prophet of Judah, Ahijah, conveniently present at that very time in Shiloh which was within Jeroboam's northern kingdom? What does his sending of his disguised wife in his own place show about his feelings? Why might Yahweh have chosen to take the king's beloved son (14:12-18; 2 S 12:14-23)? Has God really been merciful in his dealings with Jeroboam (Is 27:16)? Are there people like him in church today? However, who alone really knows their heart (1 S 16:7; 1 K 8:39; 1 Ch 28:9; Lk 16:15; Jn 2:23-25)?

1. Why do you think that from the time of king Solomon on, queen mothers had great political and religious influence in Judah (1 K 1:11f)? How might one of the many wives in a royal harem become the influential queen mother of the heir to the throne (2 Ch 11:18-22)? Who was Rehoboam's mother (1 K 14:21, 31; 11:1)? Why is her ethnic origin so important that it is mentioned twice in the same chapter, without even the usual mention of her father's name [but added with his Ammonite royal connection in the LXX]? Who were the Ammonites in relation to the Israelites (Gn 19:38; Dt 2:19, 37; Ju 3:13; 10:6; 11:13-15, 28, 32f; 1 S 11:1-11; 2 S 10:1-11:1; 12:26-31; 17:27-29)? What was their religious orientation (Lv 18:21; 20:2-5)? How might Naamah have influenced her royal son's struggle to try to maintain religious purity in Judah (1 K 11:1, 4-7, 33; 2 Ch 11:13-15)? How much has your mother influenced your spiritual development and orientation? How can the church pay more attention to the spiritual influence of mothers?
2. What conditions led to the disastrous invasion by the Egyptian Pharaoh, Shishak, in 926 B.C. [one of the internationally fixed dates of Old Testament chronology]? What did Yahweh intend to teach the leaders of Judah and Rehoboam (2 Ch 12:6-8, 12) by this? How much did they learn? With what result (2 Ch 12:12)? Who and what do a nation's security really depend upon, if not on fortifications (2 Ch 11:5-12; 12:2-4)? What applications are relevant to Christians today? How does service of Yahweh differ from inter-human slavery (2 Ch 12:8; Ro 6:15-23; 1 P 2:16; 2 Co 5:14f)?
3. How fleeting are riches, even national ones (1 K 10:14-21, 25, 27; 2 Ch 9:13-23, 27; 12:9)? How much does wealth really depend upon Yahweh's empowerment and favour (Dt 8:8:17f; Ps 12:1, 3; 1 Ti 6:17)? How can the loss of riches change one's scale of values (1 K 14:26f; 2 Ch 9:9-11)? How have you witnessed this? What lessons can you draw from this?
4. How do the reigns, lives and spirituality of Rehoboam and Jeroboam compare? What did each of them do to further and hinder the Reign/ Kingdom of Yahweh, whom they both claimed to be serving? Were either of them really wholeheartedly committed to Yahweh? Why do you think they were continually at war with one another (1 K 14:30; 2 Ch 12:15)? Might Rehoboam's ambitions to reunite Judah and Israel help explain why Rehoboam never build fortifications on his northern frontier?
5. Besides the extensive genealogical records for 1 Ch 1-9, what contemporary sources available to later writers were most frequently cited in Kings and Chronicles, usually after mentioning a king's death (1 K 14:19, 29; 2 Ch 16:11, etc.)? By skimming through all the references to these documents (1 Ch 29:29f; 2 Ch 9:29-31; 12:15f; 13:22; 20:34; 26:22, etc.), what can you learn about the sorts of things they recorded? What seems to have been the role of prophets in the writing and keeping such records? What seem to have been their main interests and their perspective?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 4: 1 Kings 15:1-8- 2 Chronicles 13:1-16:14 & 1 Kings 15:9-16:7

1. How do Kings' Chronicles' accounts of the reign of Abijah/ Abijam compare, especially in the evaluation of his faithfulness to Yahweh? How well do their two different names for him, Abijah = "my father is Yahweh" and Abijam [= "father of the sea/ west"], express the assessments of Chronicles and Kings respectively? How deep did his claim to orthodoxy [right religious opinion] go? How true was Abijah's version of Judah's and Israel's history (2 Ch 13:5-12) compared to that of the Chronicler earlier in chapters. 10-12? Why did Yahweh support him against Jeroboam's superior military strength and strategy?
2. Does the designation of David's great sin as "the case of Uriah the Hittite" (1 K 15:5) rather than "the case of Bathsheba. the wife of Uriah the Hittite": (a) merely express a pervading patriarchal perspective, (b) whitewash Solomon's mothers' and Abijah's grandmother's part in that sordid affair, or (c) indicate that murder is a more serious sin than adultery (Ex 20:13f Dt 5:17f)? Would most Christians today agree with each of these possibilities? Why?
3. What were the extent, method and results of the religious reformation of Judah under Asa? What did it cost him personally? What sort of religious reform is needed in the church as you know it today? What might such a reform cost you and the Christians that you know?
4. What view of Yahweh's relationship to human leaders was presented by all of the prophets here (2 Ch 15:1-7; 16:7-9; 1 K 16:1-4)? How much did Asa understand and apply this? How did his people in Judah, and even some in Israel (2 Ch 15:9), respond? Why? How important to Asa and his people then and later was Yahweh's conditional promise through Azariah (2 Ch 15:2, 4, 15; 16:7)? What relevance should this promise and warning have for Christians today?
5. How does Asa's reliance upon Yahweh early in his reign (1 K 15:9-15; 2 Ch 14:2-6, 9-13; 15:8-18) compare with that in his later years (1 K 15:16-23; 2 Ch 16:1-6, 7-14)? What might account for any changes? Has there been a similar pattern in your relationship to God (Rv 2:4f)? How could Asa's heart, nevertheless, be deemed "fully committed to Yahweh all his life" (1 K 15:14; 2 Ch 15:17; 21:12)? What might that mean for you? What evidence can you find that the Chronicler had access to more sources than the writer of Kings?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 5: 1 Kings 16:8-34 & 2 Chronicles 17:1-18:1.

1. What can we learn about the self-propagating and escalating power of sin from the reigns of the kings of Israel of this period? What also may be learned about the certainty of Yahweh's promised judgement?
2. Was Zimri's suicide justified (1 K 16:18)? How is it evaluated here? Why?
3. Why is Omri's decade-long reign dismissed so summarily by the biblical writers, when according to Assyrian and Moabite records he was an able and powerful ruler, and his building of Samaria as a new capital for Israel must have been an important political event in the history of Israel (1 K 16:24)? How might God evaluate and record the spiritual and eternal significance of some of our age's greatest leaders? What might you be remembered for by God's people? By others?
4. What was the political rationale and religious significance of Omri's marrying his son and heir, Ahab, to Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon (1 K 18:13, 18f)? Was that the only reason why he was so poorly evaluated in 1 K 16:25f? Could this, however, have lead Ahab to venture well beyond any of his predecessors' perversions of the worship of Yahweh to outright paganism and idolatry, thereby setting a new low for evil in Israel (1 K 16:30-33)? What might be the spiritual consequences of marriages in your family (1 Co 7:12-16; 2 Co 6:14-18)?
5. In how many ways might Jehoshaphat be called "one of the best kings of Judah"? Why was it necessary for him to develop a special religious educational program for God's people early in his reign? Is something equivalent urgently needed today? Why? What might such a program involve? Who implemented the program then? How? Who should implement one now? How? Would you like to be involved? Why and how?

1. How was the prophet Elijah trained in faith at Cherith and Zerephath in preparation for his great spiritual struggle on Mt. Carmel? How has your faith been strengthened for the spiritual challenges that might lie ahead for you?
2. What lesson does Jesus draw in his hometown, Nazareth, from Elijah's being sent to a foreign widow, rather than to one of the many Israelite ones (Lk 4:22-28)? What does Elijah's time with this widow teach us about (a) faith in Yahweh and (b) God's view of who his people are? How did Yahweh's command to take care of Elijah come to the widow? What does this indicate about divine-human partnerships in God's ministry? How did Yahweh mature her faith? How does He mature your faith (He 5:8; 12:1-13)? What can living with a servant of Yahweh teach even pagans (1 K 17:18)? What might this mean for you and those who live with or near you?
3. Could 17:14 legitimately be applied as a divine promise to a Christian congregation during a time of spiritual and/or economic drought? What relevance might it have to your congregation? Is this one reason why the prayer over a congregation's offerings sometimes (even often) may speak of "multiplying" it?
4. What do you make of the interaction between the loyal Yahwehists, Elijah and Obadiah? What convinced Obadiah to do the dangerous thing which Elijah asked?
5. What do Elijah's prayers, when he was under great pressure, reveal about his view of Yahweh and his relationship with him? How do his views of Yahweh compare to those of Ba'al in the prayers of his own prophets? How should we Christians pray, if Yahweh really is alive and well on Planet Earth? How is the challenge of Elijah to the Israelites (18:21) relevant to Christians today? Who is Yahweh's rival for our trust today? What sign might convince people today that Yahweh is the true God?
6. How do you imagine Elijah's amazing, divinely-powered and wind-assisted, seventeen-mile run before Ahab's chariot (18:46)? Would Ahab have made that trip particularly easy for Elijah? How might Ahab have felt on the way: (a) about publicly loosing yet again to his arch enemy, Yahweh's prophet, (b) about Elijah's public endorsement of his continuing reign by personally leading the honourable escort home and (c) about how he could ever explain what happened to Jezebel, the arch patroness of Ba'al (19:1f)

1. Who seems to have been the real ruler of Israel? How well did Elijah know that?
2. What do you think were the contributing causes of Elijah's deep depression and sense of failure? Although death seemed attractive, why didn't Elijah attempt suicide? How does Yahweh's way of dealing with Elijah here exemplify Ps 103:13-18 and Israel's credo (Ex 34:61)? How do you handle the lows after your emotional and spiritual highs? How does how God help prepare you to be his partner in helping others in a similar state (2 Co 1:3-5)?
3. Why do you think it was that Elijah became most acutely aware of his personal summons into Yahweh's presence through the quiet sound, rather than through the preceding word and dramatic signs that seemed so in keeping with his recent public experiences of Yahweh? Would you, like Elijah, have covered your face when obeying Yahweh's summons? Why? How can you be ready to meet God whenever and however he decides to call you personally into his presence? How might you answer Yahweh's repeated question to Elijah? How does Yahweh's reply to Elijah meet the several concerns buried beneath the surface of Elijah's routine answer to that question? How might Yahweh respond to your routine answers? How open are you to the possibility that God wants to commission you to his further ministry/service?
4. How does Yahweh deal with Elijah's false (18:13) sense of being the only one left who is loyal to Yahweh's covenant, worship and service? How readily do you seek out the companionship that Yahweh provides in carrying out his work? How often would it seem that God wants his ministers to serve together in complementary teams (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1; Ac 11:30; 13:2; 14:12; 15:39f; 1 Co 3:9; 12:8-10)? Why, however, do we Christian ministers [whether lay or professional] often prefer to serve God by ourselves (1 Co 12:20-26)? How well do you respond to someone's call to come and assist them in some aspect of God's work? What implications might it have for you, your family, your vocation, your livelihood, your congregation, even your worship? What can we learn from Elisha here?
5. What insight do we get in ch. 20 into the ways Yahweh's prophets worked and communicated their messages (1 S 12:1-7; 1 K 13:11-32)? To what might the new, apparently more positive, working relationship between Ahab and Yahweh's prophets be attributed? How well does Ahab really hear the prophet's messages and take them seriously? Who are God's prophets today? How do they relate to our present national and international leaders? What lessons for our day might be drawn from the prophetic messages of the 9th century B.C.? Does this subvert either human freedom to decide or human responsibility? How so?

1. How did Ahab feel when Nabob rejected what he thought was an economically fair offer for the vineyard (1 K 21:4)? Can you sympathize with Ahab? How frequently did Ahab react this way when crossed or criticized (1 K 18:16f; 20:43; 22:8)? Have you ever felt similarly? How did you deal with these feelings?
2. Why might Jezebel not have recognized Naboth's covenantal rights and responsibilities with respect to his family's inalienable inheritance (Nu 36:7)? What, however, seems to have been the source of Jezebel's different set of economic values (1 K 16:31; 21:7)? How, then, did she think it was perfectly legitimate to solve Ahab's little problem? How similar was this situation and solution to it to those which David arranged because of Bathsheba's pregnancy (2 S 11)? Yet, how different were the two king's reaction to their prophetic rebuke (2 S 12:13; 1K 21:20)? Who does Yahweh hold responsible in each case (2 S 12:9; 1K 21:19, 25)? What reasons are given for Yahweh's judgement (2 S 9f, 14; 1K 21:19, 22, 25)? Which of Yahweh's ten commandments did each king break? What practical social values in these spheres does your culture hold today? How is acting on values that "despise the word of Yahweh" (1 S 12:9; 1 K 21:20, 25) really a matter of doing evil by following the values that idols represent (1 K 21:26), both then and now? How do your practical values reflect God's concerns, rather than those of your society and its gods? If both Ahab and David can be forgiven their great sins because they repented and humbled themselves before Yahweh (2 S 12:15; 1K 21:27f), what about you and your sins?
3. How would you imagine making a movie based upon 1 K 22 or 2 Ch 18? How would you stage the scene in 1 K 22:9-18 or 2 Ch 18:15-17? What contrasts would you emphasize? How do you account for the differences between the attitudes of the two kings towards Yahweh's prophets? On what basis did Ahab prefer some prophets over others? Who are God's prophets today? What are your attitudes towards them? Which example would you want them to follow, Micaiah's or Zedekiah's? Why? How could you tell which of differing prophets really was Yahweh's spokesperson (Dt 18:21; 1 S 3:19; 1 K 21:28)? How do you interpret Micaiah's initial behaviour as true prophet of Yahweh: was he (a) just as deceived by the lying-spirit (1 K 22:19-23; 2 Ch 18:18-22) as were all the other prophets (1 K 22:6, 12; 2 Ch 18:5, 10), (b) being ironically ambiguous (1 K 22:15), or (c) even deliberately lying (2 Ch 18:14) to facilitate Yahweh's plans for Ahab? If (c), does that implicate Yahweh in his lying? What do we learn from this story about the role of courtly prophets? What do you make of the prophet Jehu's subsequent, mixed review of Jehoshaphat's military alliance with Ahab (2 Ch 19: 13)? How many good Christian leaders today make some major mistakes? What sort of evaluation do you give them? Why?
4. What do you make of Micaiah's vision of Yahweh's heavenly council and the strategy adopted (1 K 22:19-23)? What does that imply about Yahweh? How does it compare to the picture of the heavenly council and Yahweh in the prologue to the Book of Job (Jb 1:5-2:10)? Could the spirit of deception here have been Satan (2 S 24:1; 1 Ch 21:1; Jn 8:44)? How literally should these pictures be taken theologically? Is Yahweh free to use even evil means to accomplish his just purposes (Gn 18:25; Dt 32:4; Hb 1:5ff; Ja 1:12-18; 1 Jn 1:5f)? Do good ends ever fully justify any means whatever?
5. How does Yahweh here (1 K 22:30-34; 1 Ch 18:29-33) employ what seems to be rather arbitrary and even random decisions and actions to accomplish his purposes? Have you witnessed this phenomenon? When? Does this in any way subvert human freedom and responsibility? How so?

1. Did Jehoshaphat continue his early program of destroying the traditional high places in Judah (2 Ch 17:6; 1 K 22:43; 2 Ch 20:33)? Why? How much did the people have to do with how far he went on this (2 Ch 20:33)? Have you made similar adjustments over the years in your Christian ministry? Why? However, how far did he go in following through on his father Asa's policy on the country's traditional Canaanite-like male cult prostitutes (1 K 14:24; 15:12; 22:46)? What is the attitude of the authors of Kings to such sexual-religious practices (1 K 14:24)? What connection did these practices have with pagan Canaanite worship patterns (Dt 23:17)? Does this imply a clear Christian rejection of all sexual-religious worship practices? How does 1 Co 6:9-11 throw light upon what happened among Christians in 1st century Corinth, the sexuality capital of the Roman Empire?
2. How might, the events described in 1 K 21-22 and 2 Ch 18-19, especially Jehoshaphat's witnessing of the prophet/ roles of Elijah and Micaiah, have helped motivate him to reform the justice system of Judah (2 Ch 19:8-11)? What are its important features? What sharp legal distinction is clearly expressed in 2 Ch 19:11 (Lk 20:25)? What is it called today? What role does Yahweh himself play in administering all justice (2 Ch 19:6f)? Nevertheless, how do human judges serve both spheres of the law (2 Ch 19:9)? Is there, therefore, a divine-human partnership here (Ex 21:6; 22:8; 1 S 2:25; Ps 82:1, 6; 138:1; Ro 13:1-6)? What about in your country's and church's justice system? How well should Christians respect both of these legal spheres today?
3. What crisis leadership qualities does Jehoshaphat display in the face of the coalition attack by Judah's south-eastern neighbours on Judah? What can you learn as a leader from his approach to this military crisis?
4. Would you like to be known as "the friend of God" as Abraham was (2 Ch 20:7; Is 41:8; Ja 2:23)? What would that involve for you in practice?
5. When would it be appropriate to pray the last sentence of Jehoshaphat's great prayer (2 Ch 20:12)? Have you ever done so? What exactly did you pray? What did the Judeans' response indicate (2 Ch 20:18)? Would you have responded the same way, if you had heard Yahweh's word through Jahaziel? How hard is it for you to remember (a) that "the battle is not yours but God's" (1 S 17:47), (b) to "stand and see the salvation of Yahweh on your behalf" (Ex 14:13) and (c) to "go out to face them, for Yahweh is with you" (2 Ch 15:2)? What would each of these mean for you in practice?
6. Is praise of Yahweh a suitable offensive weapon in spiritual warfare today (2 Ch 20:22)? Should the focus of Christian praise be the same as the traditional Israelite creedal one was (Ex 24:6; 1 Ch 16:24; Ps 136; 2 Ch 20:21)? How clearly do New Testament and Christian doxologies reflect this praise focus? Why was the naming the valley "Beracah" [Heb. = blessing] so appropriate (2 Ch 20:26)? Should Christians remember and celebrate Yahweh's basic character and actions in our choice of names? Why has "Beracah" been revived as a suitable name today?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 10: 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 & 1 Kings 22:48-2 Kings 2:25.

1. According to Kings and Chronicles, what was wrong with Jehoshaphat's southern maritime enterprise? Does Yahweh still become involved in his people's business ventures today? Why should Christians be careful about their business partnerships (1 Co 5:9-13; 2 Co 6:14-18; Ep 5:6-12)? Why should they also be careful about what the "bottom line" in their business really is (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13)?
2. How do the ends of Ahaziah and Elijah compare (2K 1:1-4, 16f; 2:1-12)? What were the fundamental differences between these two as leaders of God's people (1 Jn 2:15-17)? What can you personally learn from this?
3. Why did Elijah treat Ahaziah's military messengers so harshly? What development can you discern in these encounters? Why was the third group treated differently? What was at stake here (a) for Elijah, (b) for the king and (c) for the messengers? How much value do you place upon human life? Why? How do you reckon with that evaluation when your own life seems threatened? What biblical warrant is there for killing in self-defense? What extra-biblical arguments might be adduced to justify this as a basic human right? Would it be right to extend or include a person's livelihood, lifestyle and possessions? When has that happened? With what consequences?
4. Who were the "sons of the prophets" (1 S 19:20; 2 K 2:5, 7,15-18; 4:1,38; 5:22; 6:1; 8:1-3)? What relationship did Elisha maintain with them? How did they know what was going to happen to Elijah? Why were they so interested? How much of this event do you think they witnessed at a distance? Why was it important that they did witness something of this transfer of senior prophetic calling? What seemed to concern them most? What other groups seemed to need to be convinced dramatically about Elisha's new prophetic role (2K 2:19-24)? Why do you think he went all the way across the country to visit Mt Carmel before settling in the capital city, Samaria? Why might it signal for a senior prophet to settle down in Israel's capital? How unlike Elijah does Elisha already seem to be and function?
5. In what ways was Elisha tested both before and after losing his master/ mentor, Elijah? What qualities in him were, thereby, revealed? How might you stand up under such testing? How has God tested your character and commitment? What do you think He discovered?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 11: 2 Kings 3:1-4:44.

1. When do the three kings who were attacking rebellious Moab from the south [Edom] think of seeking Yahweh's advice through his prophet, Elisha? When should they have consulted him (2 Ch 20:14, 14f)? When do you seek Yahweh's guidance about a project, enterprise or undertaking of yours? With what consequences?
2. Why do you think Elisha respected only king Jehoshaphat? How important can the faith of one person be for the welfare of many (1 K 11:12, 34; 2K 8:19; 2 Ch 6:42; 20:7; 21:7; Jr 5:1f)? How might this truth be grounded in Yahweh's character (Ex 34:6f)? Have you ever witnessed his being merciful to you because of someone else's faith (Mk 2:1-12; Ac 2:39; 1 Co 7:6f; Phm; Ro 4:23; 5:15; Ac 15:11)? Have you ever been aware that your faith in Yahweh has led to his caring for others' welfare? How important, therefore, can your intercessory prayer for those associated with you be (Gn 18:22-33; Jn 9:31; 17:1-20; Ja 5:16)?
3. What had the minstrel to do with Elisha's prophesying here (3:15; 1 S 10:5 10f)? Why might the Moabites have thought that the armies of the three kings had turned and slaughtered one another (3:22f; 2 Ch 20:1, 23)? Why do you think Yahweh ordered the ecological destruction of Moab (3:19, 25)? How effective was the king of Moab's sacrifice of his eldest son and heir on the city wall (3:27)? Whose wrath was, thereby, stirred up against Israel? Why?
4. Can you identify with either or both of the two women of ch. 4? How easy is it to have faith like theirs? When have you needed such faith? To whom did you turn for Yahweh's guidance or help then? What were you advised to do? How did it help you?
5. What is revealed in ch. 4 about (a) Elisha's character, (b) his relationship to Yahweh, (c) his relationship to his servant and (d) his relationship to the people? What lessons might Yahweh's servant ministers today draw from this? As a prophet of Yahweh, why didn't Elisha always know what was going to happen or what people were thinking (4:27; 5:26)? What do you make of the many miracles of Elisha? Are some miracles harder than others? Why? What similarities can you see with some of Jesus' miracles (Mk 8:23; 9:29)?

1. What important lessons can each of the characters in ch. 5 teach us? With which can you most easily identify? Why?
2. What glimpse is given here in ch. 5 into Yahweh's relationships with non-Israelites, even if they happen to be leaders of Israel's current enemy [Syria]? How does that fit with (a) the view that Yahweh is only a national deity and (b) your own view of him? How many accommodations does Yahweh make for outsiders? Why? How did Yahweh deal with the very same enemies of Israel in chs. 6 & 7? Why was Yahweh's approach to the same people now different?
3. In what spheres of life does Elisha have authority and influence as Yahweh's servant? How does Elisha deal with important political and military figures throughout these three chapters? How do they deal with him as a prophet of Yahweh? What might this imply about the role of prophets in Israel and the Ancient Near East generally? What limits would you place upon Yahweh's sharing of his authority and power with his servants/ ministers (Mk 2:5-12; Jn 20:21-23)? What makes it difficult for many ordinary Christians to view and act upon God's view of them as partners in his great enterprise (Ps 8; He 2:5-11)? How does this apply to you personally?
4. What do you make of some very strong statements various people make in ch. 6? Can Elisha's statement to his attendant in 6:16 be taken to apply more generally to God's people and servants (2 Ch 32:7f)? Are any Christians justified in saying to anyone in great need, what the king of Israel said to a starving woman subject in 6:27 (Ac 3:2-6; 1 In 3:17f; Ja 2:15-17)? Is the king of Israel's judgement in 6:33 one that any Christian should ever make? What sense is there in it?
5. How well can you identify with the following characters in the story of the siege of Samaria: (a) Elisha, (b) the king of Israel, (c) the lepers, (d) the king's household servant and (e) the royal officer? What lessons can be learned from what each of them said and did? How could the lepers be compared to Christian witnesses? How do your motives as witnesses compare to theirs (7:9)?

TRAIL V - SECTION 13: 2 Kings 8:1-10:36 & 2 Chronicles 21:1-22:9.

1. When have you experienced God's providential timing in your life, somewhat similar to that of the woman of Shunem (2 K 4:8-37; 8:4-8)? What makes you think that these occurrences are more than just welcome coincidences? How often are they associated closely with your prayers? How crucial in our lives is timing, which we humans can't control very well? Why do we find it hard to leave its good management to Yahweh, the lord of all time and space?
2. By this time (2 K 5:1-7:20), why did Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, have such great respect for Elisha and his special relationship to Yahweh, that he consulted him about his own serious illness (2 K 8:7-9)? Did the king's respect and abundant gifts influence Elisha's answer from Yahweh? What other factors were at play for Elisha? Could Elisha have been speaking the truth about the king's prospects for recovery from his illness (2 K 8:10, 14)? What more, however, had Yahweh revealed to him (2 K 8:10)? Why did he proceed to tell Hazael this, then stare fixedly at him? How do you read the psychology of this interaction? What was the effect of Elisha's weeping and his explanation of it, on Hazael? How do you interpret Hazael's denial? What does Elisha's parting revelation indicate about how he understood Yahweh's plans and his own role in them (1K 19:15; 2K 8:13)? Do you think he felt much the same about arranging to have captain Jehu anointed king of Israel (2 K 9:1-10)? Why do you think Elisha sent an assistant to anoint Jehu, when he had been brave enough to enter the Syrian capital and there name Ben-Hadad's assassin-successor to his face? How might his personal non-involvement affect his later ministry to Jehu and his successors (2K 13:14-19)?
3. How were Yahweh's earlier instructions to Elijah followed up, if not personally carried out, by his successor, Elisha, and his assistants (1 K 19:15f; 2K 8:7-15; 9:1-13)? How often has God's working through you been in partnership with others (1 Co 3:6-9)? How well do you share the tasks of Christian ministries in which you are meant to be co-partners with others? How many important spiritual tasks can be accomplished concretely by one agent of God all by himself? Does this explain why spiritual gifts that need to work together to accomplish anything are distributed by God's Spirit to different people (1 Co 12:8-10)?
4. Does 2K 8:16 indicate that Jehoshaphat and his son J(eh)oram reigned for a while simultaneously in Judah? If so, what does this imply about comparative dating of and by these king's reigns? Furthermore, might the different datings in 2 K 8:25 and 9:29 of when Ahaziah of Judah began to reign in reference to the reign of J(eh)oram of Israel indicate that the two kingdoms may have practiced different ways of reckoning the dating of their kings' first year? Can you appreciate, then, how these two basic insights could help biblical historians reconstruct the comparative dating of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah throughout the divided kingdom period?
5. What insights into how prophecy may be fulfilled in the rough and tumble of political history are disclosed in the details of Jehu's revolution which impact both Israel and Judah (1 K 19:15f 21:17-19, 21-29)? What part does Yahweh play in all this? What general light does this throw upon how God works in human history (He 10:31)? How well did Yahweh know Jehu's heart (2K 10:30f), in order to select him as the right agent for the terrible job of judgement? Does Jezebel's calling Jehu "Zimri" indicate that she recognized his special role (1 K 16:8-13)? In what ways does Jehu try to keep his royal name pure amid all the carnage of the comprehensive international blood purge (2K 9:32f 10:1-11, 15-28; Jr 35:1-19)? How similar or different are the human politics that you know about today? How well can Christians function in this important, but often very compromised, arena? How and how often do you pray for your politicians, especially the Christian ones?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 14: 2 Kings 11:1-12:21 & 2 Chronicles 22:10-24:27.

1. Beside the common royal use of some personal names (2 K 8:18; 1 Ch 21:6, 10-15; 22:1-10; 2 K 8-27; 10:12-14), what were the long-term consequences for the rulers and people of Judah of Jehoshaphat's marriage alliance for his son J(eh)oram with the house of Omri through his granddaughter, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel? How does the intermarrying of families influence many aspects of any family's life, especially spiritually (2 Co 6:14f)? What does this illustrate about the character of many, if not all, sins? Have you ever witnessed something similar? How does this make Ex 34:7 more understandable? How did the people of Judah seem to handle it (2 Ch 21:19f)? How did Yahweh Himself use another strategic marriage alliance in Judah to end this evil influence there (2 Ch 22:11f)?
2. How does the bloody coup d'etat in Judah compare with Jehu's in Israel? When and why might an assassination be justified? Might Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer have had this event in mind, when he agreed to join the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler late in World War II? Why, in this particular historical situation in Judah, was it important that the original Mosaic copy of the ten commandments ([the testimony in the Ark of the Covenant] Ex 25:16; 31:18) play a conspicuous role in the coronation of young J(eh)oash (2K 11:12; 2 Ch 23:11; Dt 17:18-20; 1 S 12:13-15)? What do you think this symbolized (a) for Jehoida, (b) for J(eh)oash, (c) for the witnesses and (d) the citizens of Judah?
3. How do you evaluate Jehoida's strategic leadership during the contrasting reigns of queen Athaliah and king J(eh)oash? What can we learn from his character and strategies for leading God's people in our day? What impact of a dedicated and faithful Christian leader have you witnessed? How does this encourage you in the leadership ministry God's Spirit has called and equipped you to exercise (Ro 12:3; 1 Co 12:7; Ep 4:16)?
4. How deep did the reforms of J(eh)oash go? Why? On what did they depend (2 Ch 24:1, 14, 17f)? Why do you think he had no more success than his grandfather, Jehoshaphat, and his great grandfather, Asa, in completely eradicating the people's folk religion in Judah (1 K 15:12-14; 22:43,46; 2K 12:3; 2 Ch 14:2-5; 15:1-18; 17:6; 19:3; 20:32f; 24:17-22)? Why do you think it was Jehoiada, the priest, rather than J(eh)oash, the king, who got the royal burial (2 Ch 24:16, 25)? What elements of pagan folk religion remain among the Christians that you know? What accounts for their persistent influence then and now? Should they be eradicated? How can they be?
5. How do you imagine what happened in the restoration of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem from the two accounts here? Why might extensive repairs be necessary? Can you think of any parallels today? What does that mean to you? What can you do about it?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 15: 2 Kings 13:1-14:29 & 2 Chronicles 25:1-28.

1. In what way did each of the four kings in this period fall short of what God required of them as leaders of his people, however successful they might have been in other respects? Were they all equally disappointing to Yahweh? What were the consequences for them and their people? What prompted any of them to seek out Yahweh (2 Ch 15:4)? What motivated Yahweh to bless any of them, in spite of their failures (Dt4:29; 2K 13:23; 14:26f; 1 Ch 28:9; 2 Ch 15:2; Jr 29:13; Mt 7:7f)? What can we learn from this about God and ourselves?
2. How are these two incidents concerning Elisha typical of his powerful role as Yahweh's prophet in Israel? How was he like and unlike his predecessor, Elijah? What parallels can you see between their similar and different ministries and those of John, the Baptist, and Jesus, the Messiah? What can we Christians learn from this about the similarities and differences of Christian ministries for our day?
3. What basic lesson about faith does Elisha's angry rebuke of J(eh)oash suggest to you (2 K 13:19)? What lesson about self-confidence can be learned from Amaziah's and J(eh)oash's interaction (2 K 14:7-14; 2 Ch 25:17-24)?
4. In light of Mt 6:24, what concerns are addressed with king Amaziah by the man of God and the prophet (2 Ch 25:6-10, 14-16)? What were (a) the king's responses, (b) the attitudes behind them and (c) their consequences? How prevalent are such attitudes today? With whom?
5. What accounts for the new pattern for changing and securing political power that developed in Judah during this period (2K 11:1, 15f; 12:20f; 14:19; 2 Ch 22:10f; 23:15; 24:25; 25:3f, 27)? Do similar things happen in your country today? What do Christians think and do about it? Why?

INTRODUCTION TO JOEL

Nothing is known of this prophet beyond what is stated in the first verse of his book, plus the evident fact that he prophesied to Judah. Because of substantial parallels between his messages, images and words to those of most of the other Hebrew writing prophets, it is thought that either he was greatly influenced by earlier authors, or his prophecy remarkably impacted many later writers. Thus, he is generally reckoned as either one of the earliest writing prophets, or one of the latest. Because his whole prophecy is knit together in such a tightly crafted poetic whole that biblical scholars are still engaged in unpacking it, it seems unlikely that his work is just a mishmash of earlier prophetic ideas. Therefore, we will give him the benefit of the doubt and treat him as the first writing prophet: i.e., one living in or near Jerusalem early in the 8th century BC, who had a detailed knowledge of the temple's procedures and was sympathetic with its cult, though probably not a priest himself. Fortunately, the dates of his ministry and his writing, early or late, are not important for understanding his message or the beauty of his poetry.

The original occasion for his prophecy seems to have been an unusually severe plague of locusts, apparently accompanied by drought (1:18-20). He summoned the people to national repentance and personal-humility. Whereupon, he was authorized by Yahweh to declare the speedy departure of the locusts and the restoration of the land.

But Joel was also given a more ultimate vision. The plague of locusts *was* a symbol of the approaching terrible day of Yahweh. He foresaw both a widespread outpouring of God's Spirit and a gathering of nations to answer for their oppression of God's people. Ultimately Yahweh will triumph and bless his people.

ANALYSIS OF JOEL

1:1-2:17 The prophet calls the people to lament and repent:

1:1 The title of the book.

1:2-4 An unprecedented and unique calamity.

1:5-14 Calls to those affected to repent.

1:15-20 Surely, the day of Yahweh is near.

2:1-11 Vivid picture of the locust plague

2:12-17 Call to repentance for salvation.

2:18-3:21 Yahweh responds:

2:18-27 Restoration from the current disaster.

2:28-3:21 The day of Yahweh.

2:28-29 The outpouring of God's Spirit.

2:30-31; 3:15 Natural portents.

2:32; 3:1, 16-18, 20-21 Deliverance of the remnant of God's people.

3:2-14, 19 Judgement on the oppressing nations.

1. According to Joel's prophecy, what will be the positive and negative consequences of the coming of the day of Yahweh? How does his detailed description of the great locust plague's devastation illustrate the impact of the day of Yahweh? What do the locusts represent (2:20, 26)? Why did Joel think that day was coming very soon? How might its full negative force be averted (1:13f; 2:12-17)? What expectations did many 1st century Jews have for the coming of God's Messiah and the Messianic Age (Ac 1:1-8)? What, however, did Jesus teach about that day's coming (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 24)? How do you think the day of Yahweh is related to the return of God's Messiah? Should Christians' response to the prospects of that advent/ coming be the same or different from that recommended by Joel (1 Co 16:22; 1 Th 5:1-11; Ph 4:46; Ja 5:7-11; 1 P 4:7-19; Rv 22:20)?
2. How does Joel use a reference to the fundamental Mosaic creed of Ex 34:6f to prompt the people of Judah to return to Yahweh (Jl 2:12-14)? How was this repentance [= turning around/ returning] to be expressed corporately and publicly (Jl 1:13f; 2:12-17)? Why does it so often take a calamity to inspire repentance in an individual, a congregation or in a nation?
3. To what extent was the great eschatological [for the end times] promise of 2:28-32 fulfilled for early Christians on the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church (Ac 2:1-21)? What more can be expected in the future? When? How important to you is the practical promise of the role of God's Spirit in Jl 2:28a? Do you pray for this (a) in your own life, (b) in that of your friends (c) your family, (d) your congregation, (e) your nation? What answer to your prayers have you witnessed so far?
4. How does the apostle Paul apply Joel's word of Yahweh's deliverance to everyone who calls upon the name of Yahweh (2:32) in Ro 10:12-15)? How does that apply to yourself and to people that you know?
5. How might Joel's view of the ultimate judgement of the nations oppressing God's people (3:2-15), be in Jesus' mind when he pictured of the eschatological judgement of nations in Mt 25:31-46? According to Jesus, what determines how each nation will be judged? How well does this accord with Joel's account? What relevance could both pictures of the judging of nations have for your nation? What does it mean to you that Yahweh is frequently presented in the Bible as evaluating nations and giving them their due recompense? What part does this play in your view of God's involvement in human history (Ps 2:1-5; 59:8; Am 1f; Is 13-24; 34; Jr 46-51; Ek 25-33)?

INTRODUCTION TO JONAH

The prophet Jonah is mentioned by name in 2K 14:25 as having predicted the victories of Jeroboam II that greatly extended the borders of the kingdom of Israel. Because Assyria had broken the power of the confederation of Aramaean/ Syrian city states and was herself temporarily otherwise occupied, both Israel under Jeroboam II and Judah under Uzziah/ Azariah were able to move into the vacuum, extending their borders almost as far as those of David and Solomon. But Assyria was still there on the north-eastern horizon, a cruel and deadly military power to be reckoned with again someday soon. Jonah was, thus, probably a national hero.

This same prophet Jonah was commissioned by Yahweh later in his life to travel to Nineveh, one of the capitals of Assyria, to prophesy against it. Surely a commission of judgement on Assyria, the great enemy of his people, would have been welcome to any patriotic prophet, but not to Jonah. It was so loathsome that he preferred to resign his prophetic office, and even to die, rather than obey that particular call. Surely the exercise of Yahweh's judgment on Assyria would assure Israel an even wider sphere within which to continue to expand and prosper. But if, perchance, Assyria averted this judgement by repenting, then she might grow stronger and become an even greater threat than Jeroboam II's great grandfather, Jehu, had already experienced. Indeed, only 31 years after Jeroboam II's death Assyria did sack Samaria and end the kingdom of Israel. But why would Yahweh want to give Assyria even any opportunity to repent? What did Jonah fear Yahweh was sure to do if Assyria did repent? And why would Yahweh? Those are the great questions of the story that this book tells so graphically. The book, however, does not tell the whole story, only what happened to Jonah after he rejected Yahweh's commission. Its dramatic ending fails to say what finally happened to Jonah himself and to his us-versus-them and thinking about God.

Because of the many miraculous elements in the story, and the difficulties in substantiating how details of the story fit with what is currently known of the history of Assyria and Nineveh, the book has often been treated as a religious parable or sermon. Yet Jesus seemed to have taken it on a par with historical events (Mt 12:39-41; 16:4; Lk 11:29-32). Whether historical or not, it is one of the most remarkable books in the Bible, and rich in its spiritual teaching for God's people in any age.

ANALYSIS OF JONAH

- 1 Jonah's disobedience and its results.
- 2 His prayer of desolation and thanksgiving.
- 3 A recommissioned Jonah preaches to Nineveh with astonishing results.
- 4 Jonah's angry response and Yahweh's reproof.

1. How consistent a witness to Yahweh as the Creator-of everything (1:9), was Jonah to the pagan sailors? Which theology spoke more loudly, that of his words or that of his actions? How true is this in your experience of Christians' faith claims? What about in your own theological professions and witnessing? How well did the sailors' actions and words express their growing knowledge of Yahweh? What actions showed whose faith was more real? What models do you have for faithful Christian witness?
2. What does the somewhat stylized version of Jonah's desperate prayer from the deep, reveal about how Jonah viewed his and his people's special relationship with Yahweh? How well does he compare himself spiritually with the pagan sailors? Would you agree with him? Why? Nevertheless, with whom does Jonah confess that his salvation/ rescue really lies? Why do you think Yahweh answered Jonah's plea for rescue, in spite of his blatant rebellion and warped theology (4:2, 11)?
3. What reason did Jonah offer for his attempt to abandon his commission to proclaim Yahweh's judgement on Nineveh, a capital city of the enemy, Assyria (4:2)? In what senses was he quite right, yet even more very wrong (Ex 34:6f; Jr 18:7-10; 1 Ti 2:4)? Have you ever been asked to take a word from God to an enemy? Were you tempted to avoid doing so? What were your reasons? Have people missed important opportunities to repent/ return/ turn back to God because of the failure of God's people to speak his word to them? What do you think Yahweh will do about this (a) for his disobedient people and (b) for those to whom they failed to speak? Does the story of this book, suggest that there are really "second chances" with Yahweh? How so?
4. If you were in Jonah's shoes, would you have talked back to Yahweh the way he did in ch. 4? What are Jonah's thoughts and feelings about Yahweh's character, purposes and probable actions, even for his people's great enemy? How do your words and actions towards others, reveal your true feelings and views about Yahweh's character and purposes? How consistent was Jonah's theology as expressed in his prayer response (4:3), subsequent actions, feelings and words? In spite of Jonah himself, what theology of Yahweh and his purposes for pagans as well as for his chosen people, does the book proclaim? How can God proclaim his character through you, in spite of your actions and intentions? What do you feel about that? Do you think Jonah ever really got Yahweh's point, and himself turned around? Would you have? Why?
5. Why do you think Jesus used this particular story to answer the request for a miraculous sign? Does his usage imply that Jesus believed that the story was historical? How much does the issue of its historicity matter to what Jesus was saying about giving a miraculous sign to "this wicked generation" (Mt 16:1)? In what senses could this story be very true, even if not historically true? Do stories told in sermons to make practical points, need to be factually true? How much depends on the preacher's purpose? However, to which event in Jesus' life, and its consequences (Lk 11:32), is Jesus referring by that sign? How important to you and others is the historicity of that event (1 Co 15:14f)? Does that itself reflect back on the question of the historicity of the details of the story of Jonah? How so?

INTRODUCTION TO AMOS

Amos' ministry took place in the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II (1:1). While he himself belonged to the kingdom of Judah and was a farmer (7:14f), he was called by Yahweh to prophesy to the kingdom of Israel. He didn't sit back in Tekoa of Judah and write a prophesy to be sent to Israel. No, he went to Bethel near the southern border of Israel and confronted the perverted worship of Yahweh in the sanctuary there with such force that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, claimed that the land of Israel couldn't endure his words (7:10).

Taking advantage of the local international power vacuum, the kingdom of Israel was at that time outwardly prosperous, but all kinds of evil were rife in the land. The people and leaders, thinking themselves secure in Yahweh's favour, resented any reproof (5:10). They didn't realize that they were far from worshiping Yahweh in the way that he desired, nor that their other sins were bringing judgement very near. Filled with a vision of Yahweh's majesty and justice, Amos denounced the sins of the land and the false worship that Israel offered to him. Amos also undermined their faith that, just because they were part of Yahweh's own people, they would escape his just punishment (3:1f).

Amos also has a word from God for the nations surrounding Israel.

ANALYSIS OF AMOS

- 1:1-2.5 Yahweh's general indictment of the surrounding nations.
- 2:5-6:14 Yahweh's specific indictment of Israel itself.
- 7:1-9:15 Yahweh's judgement:
 - 7:1-9 Three visions of coming doom.
 - 7:10-17 Amos expelled from Bethel.
 - 8:1-9:10 Two more visions of coming doom.
 - 9:11-15 The ultimate restoration of God's people Israel.

1. What might you learn for your day and situation from the types of behaviour of nations that God hates, from Yahweh's indictment of the particular sins of the nations of Amos' day? Are all of those evils directed against God's own people? What does that imply about Yahweh's interest in other peoples in themselves? Does God still hate such national behaviours today? Why? How might that be relevant to your own nation?
2. How can Yahweh be specially localized in Zion (1:2), yet judge all the surrounding nations? Is Yahweh more than the just, the God of Judah/ Israel? What does this imply about the relationship of Israel/ Judah as God's special people to the other nations?
3. What did Amos seem to expect the reiterated assertion "Thus says Yahweh" to mean to the surrounding pagan nations? What might it have meant to Syria [Damascus], at least since Elisha's time (2 K 6:8-23; 8:7-15)? What should it mean to Judah and Israel (2:9f)? What should it mean to your nation?
4. What different standards does Yahweh apply to his own people, Judah and Israel (2:4, 11f)? How does that help make Yahweh's judgments fair (Ro 2:11-3:20)? Why do God's people deserve special treatment when it comes to judgement? How does that apply to Christians (1 P 4:17-19)? How do the sins of God's people that are singled out here, compare to those specified for the other nations? How would you characterize the types of sins that Yahweh particularly hates then and now? How prevalent are they in your nation? What about among Christians? What should that imply about judgement today?
5. What natural principle does Amos employ (3:3-8) to illustrate the tight spiritual connection between the prophecy of judgement on the sins of God's people and the disciplining action of Yahweh (3:1f, 7f)? How relevant is that to you and to God's people today? Who are today's prophets (3:7) warning God's people of the consequences of their actions? How well do you heed those warnings? Why should you heed them as a member of God's own people/ family (1 P 1:13-17)?

1. How are the women of the most affluent class in Israel and their judgement, graphically described in 4:1f? What many sins of that class are specified in chs. 4-6? To what extent do these very sins still infect "advanced" societies today? How prevalent are they even among Christian individuals, congregations and nations? How did such sins corrupt Israel's religious festivals (8:4-6) enough to motivate Yahweh to hate them (5:21)? How true might this be of your congregation's worship and celebrations?
2. What can Christians today learn from what Yahweh hated in Israel's worship (Mt 23:23-25)? What does he want the content of the worship of his people to include (Am 5:10-15, 24)? To take that seriously, what changes might be in order for you, your congregation, your nation? How might that be possible?
3. What variety of means does Yahweh employ in trying to bring his people back to himself and his values? Does he still use similar means today? Can you think of other means as well? How are Christian individuals, congregations and nations responding to God's persuasions? How can great affluence tend to insulate people, even Christians, from the full meaning of that great day? Why should Christians think twice at least before praying for the day of Yahweh come soon (Rv 22:20; 1 Co 16:22)?
4. Which phrases from Amos' ancient prophecy can you recognize that have become commonplace western culture? How has their meaning often been diluted or distorted? What might it mean for us to rediscover their meanings in their original 8th century BC Israelite context and apply them in our own contemporary and social context? Why might that be worth trying?
5. What characteristic of Yahweh is Amos emphasizing frequently calling Yahweh "Lord GOD [Yahweh]" (e.g. 3:8, 11, 13, 4:2, 5; 6:8; 7:1f, 4-6; 8:1, 3, 9, 11)? What different characteristic of Yahweh is designated by his occasionally adding the phrase "of hosts/ of heavenly armies" (e.g. 15f; 6:8; 9:5)? How serious might it be for theologians and translators generally to conflate these two quite distinct concepts in the term "Almighty" in the Latin Vulgate and most English translations of the Greek title "Pantokrator [All-sovereign]" in the New Testament (2 Co 6:18; Rv 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22) and in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds? How are Yahweh's might/ power and right/ sovereignty/ authority appropriately related? What biblical peoples seemed to judge that their might made all their actions right? How similar is the tendency to identify what one can do with what one may do, and even ought to do? How common are such "moral" confusions today?

1. What is the major difference in meaning between Amos' first two visions and his last three visions in 7:1-9 and 8:1-3, 7-14? What does this reveal about Yahweh's character (Ex 34:6f)?
2. On the basis of what Amos has said about Israel's deeds and who Yahweh is, how different is it for Yahweh to swear "by his holiness" [otherness] (4:2), "by himself" (6:8) and "by the pride of Jacob" (8:7)? What in fact does Yahweh think of the pride/arrogance of Jacob/ Israel (6:8-11; 8:7-10)?
3. How do you imagine the confrontation between Amaziah, the royally-appointed priest of Bethel [one of the two official sanctuaries for worshiping Yahweh in Israel (1 K 12:26-33)] and Amos, the farmer-prophet of Tekoa in Judah? What gave a mere layman the courage to confront such high-level clergy in his own sanctuary? What might this teach us about the importance of the ministry of the laity in Yahweh's economy (1 Co 12; Ro 12:3-9; Eph 4:11f; 1 P 4:10f)? How effective was Amos' confrontational approach in bringing about change? Why? Might the recommended approach to lay-ministry of 1 Co 12:31-14:1 have accomplished more for Amos at Bethel? Do ordained/ authorized Christian clergy today sometimes need the sort of words from God that Amos brought to Amaziah? Is it Amos' style of lay ministry, or something far more substantial, which offends clergy then and now? How so? Why does it sometimes also even offend some Christian laity?
4. To what extent do individuals, congregations and nations continue periodically to experience the type of famine that Amos prophesied in 8:11-14? What impact would such a famine make upon your life and relationship to God? To what extent was such a famine the general spiritual condition of God's people in the four centuries between the prophets Malachi and John the Baptist? Has such a great famine happened again? When? What sustains God's faithful people in such times (Lk 2:25-38)?
5. How might 3:12 help to reconcile the two different presentations of Yahweh's judgement in ch. 9? Where does your hope lie when it comes to facing the reality and certainty of Yahweh's judgement of every human being (2Co 5:10; Rv 20:1ff)? How does this farmer-prophet's picture of Yahweh's great restoration of his people strike you? What metaphors would you substitute for his agricultural ones?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 21: 2 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 26:1-27:9 & 2 Kings 15:9-38.

1. How much was Uzziah/ Azariah like his father, Amaziah? To what extent are you like your parents, , especially morally and spiritually? Have you helped to fulfill their dreams? How? How did Jotham, the grandson, make some progress? How are your children and grandchildren doing spiritually? Is the old adage "from clogs to clogs in three generations" applicable spiritually, either generally or in your family? Why does there often seem to be spiritual as well as economic generational cycles? How might the spiritual cycle, at least, be obviated (Dt 4:9; 6:6f; 11:18ff Ps 78:3f; Pr 22:6; Ep 6:4; Co 3:21; 2 Ti 1:5; 3:15-17)?
2. What was happening politically in the northern kingdom, Israel, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Amos (7:9, 11) and Hosea (1:4; 7:7; 8:4; 13:11)? What should this have taught the people of God living in Israel then? How well do Christians now learn God's lessons through our history? Why?
3. How would you like the decade of your reign to be remembered only for what Menahem's was in 2 K 15:14-22? What about the virtually forgotten legacy of the eight year reign of Pekah (2 K 15:25ff; 2 Ch 28:6)? Why are there much more detailed legacies of the contemporary Judean kings, Azariah/ Uzziah and Jotham in 2 Ch 26 & 27? What was the spiritual impact they had on their people? What about you will be remembered for good or ill by those for whom you bear responsibility and their descendants? What achievements of yours will they remember and celebrate? How much does this matter to you? Why? For what most do you remember your parents and grandparents? How much of this do you still celebrate?
4. Has anyone had an influence on you similar to that which Zechariah the prophet had on Uzziah/ Azariah (2 Ch 26:5)? Have you found that as long as you sought Yahweh, that he prospered you? Why (2 Ch 26:5)? Have you continued to trust in Yahweh once you became strong (2 Ch 26:15f)? What were the consequences for you and others?
5. How serious was Uzziah's sin? What can you learn from those who had to confront Uzziah with his sin? How do you handle such confrontational encounters? How suitable was the king's punishment? How did it affect others? How does 2 K 15:5 and 2 Ch 26:21 suggest a co-regency of Uzziah/ Azariah and his son Jotham?

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA.

Hosea's prophetic ministry in Israel spans about forty years from about a decade after that of Amos. The first three chapters belong to the closing years of Jeroboam II's reign. The rest of the book is a rough grouping of individual oracles that in styles and themes reflect the decades of chaotic conditions in Israel following Jeroboam's death. During that period an aggressive Assyria constantly threatened Israel and Judah.

Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom, Israel, who had been deeply taught in the school of sorrow. His own sad family history of unfaithfulness was used by the Holy Spirit to fit him in a unique way to see into the heart of Yahweh and to depict the sorrow which his people's ingratitude and unfaithfulness cause him. Nevertheless, no other prophet so reveals God's love, without in any way weakening the claims of his holiness. Thus, Hosea uniquely prepares the way for the perfect revelation of Yahweh's tough love and uncompromised holiness given in his Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

The harlot theme in Hosea has both a literal and a metaphorical meaning even for Israel. Not only had they adopted many Canaanite deities, but their religious practices involved the gross sexual immorality of male and female cultic prostitution.

ANALYSIS OF HOSEA:

- 1:1-3:5 Hosea's domestic life illustrates Yahweh's relationship to Israel:
 - 1:1-2:1 Hosea's marriage to the harlot, Gomer, and the birth of three sons.
 - 2:2-23 Yahweh's legal dispute with his faithless wife, Israel.
 - 3:1-5 Yahweh commands Hosea to redeem his faithless wife.
- 4:1-13:16 Hosea's oracles about Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh [roughly grouped]:
 - 4:1-5:7 Sweeping condemnation of pagan worship and its consequences.
 - 5:8-7:16 Yahweh's view of the brokenness of Israel's relationship with him.
 - 8:1-14 Israel's religious and political disintegration.
 - 9:1-10:15 The necessity and inevitability of Israel's doom.
 - 11:1-11 Yahweh's great love recoils from destroying his sinful son, Israel.
 - 11:12-13:16 Israel's ingratitude and unfaithfulness deserves destruction.
- 14:1-8 Call to true repentance and Yahweh's promise of restoration.
- 14:9 Epilogue: true wisdom.

1. How do you reconstruct the ups and downs of Hosea's domestic life from the evidence in these three chapters? What feelings, challenges and questions might be raised at each stage for the prophet, his wife, his children and the public? To what extent can you identify with each of them?
2. What do you think Hosea's children thought about their given names and their meanings? What is the meaning of your given name? What do you think about that? How has it and/or its meaning impacted your life? What alternative name would you prefer to have? Why? Why do you think Yahweh himself wants Israel to call him "Ishi [my husband]" rather than "Ba'ali [my master]", as they have been doing following the custom of the Canaanites with their nature gods (2:16)?
3. How does Hosea's prophecy present his domestic history as an illustration of Yahweh's relationship to his people, Israel, past, present and future (3:1)? What parallels can you see also with God's relationship to his people in subsequent ages? What can Christians learn from this as individuals, as congregations, as denominations/ communions?
4. What do you make of the words of hope spliced into this story throughout (1:7; 10-2:1; 2:16-23; 3:5)? What is the purpose of mixing them in like that? How does 2:19 echo the great credo of Ex 34:6f as the divinely revealed basis of Israel's hope? What is your hope as a Christian? What is its basis? How does that relate to Ex 34:6f and Yahweh's self-disclosed character?
5. How well can you view this story as a picture of God's relationship to yourself personally? At what stage is your relationship to Yahweh now? Where might it go next? What can you do about this? What will you do?
6. How does the New Testament employ this story in Ro 9:25f and 1 P 2:9f? What are the implications for the Christian church? What are the implications for those who are not yet members of God's people?

1. What outward sins of Israel does Yahweh repudiate here? What inward condition caused these sins? What are the consequences of these sins for others? How well does this description apply to your society, to your congregation, to your family and to you?
2. What leaders in Israel are singled out as particularly responsible for these sins and their consequences? Who are affected by their derelict behaviour? To what extent is such failure of similar types of leaders true today? What can you do about it (4:15; 6:6)?
3. What are the consequences of having, remembering and heeding correct knowledge of God (4:1f, 6, 10; 5:4)? What is involved in this knowing process (4:1; 5:15; 6:3f, 6)? What does this mean for you and your fuller knowledge of Yahweh?
4. In what ways and to what extent is the more orthodox southern kingdom of Judah also implicated in some of this (1:7, 11; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12-14; 6:4, 11; 8:14; 10:11; 11:12; 12.2)? Is there, therefore, more hope for Judah than for Israel? Why? How relevant is this to churches today that pride themselves on their orthodoxy? How relevant is it to your denomination and congregation?
5. What does each of the many similes and metaphors in 5:10-6:6, add to the picture of the Israelites and their relationship to Yahweh? What metaphors would you use to describe your relationship to God and to others? How do they compare with Hosea's?
6. Why does 4:14 suggest that men should not apply a double standard for prostitutes and adulterous wives? How relevant is that today in your secular and Christian communities?

1. What are the dynamics of Hosea's imaginary dialogue between Yahweh and Israel (5:14-6:6)? How is Israel's situation far more serious than they realize? What does Yahweh think about the depth of Israel's repentance (7:13-16) and about their counting on his routine mercy/ salvation (6:1-4)? How is that quite like some Christians' routine confessions of their habitual sins? What does Yahweh desire to find in his people that is too often sorely lacking then and now? How does this dialogue set the stage for the details that are drawn out in the rest of today's section?
2. What are Israel's attitudes to Yahweh? What are Yahweh's to Israel and their relationship? How do Hosea's similes and metaphors in these chapters illuminate both sides of their relationship? What did God want them to do (6:6; 10:12 12:6)? Do both the metaphors and the injunctions still apply to God's people? Might you need to change your attitude to God and his purposes for you? How is that possible (Ro 12:2)?
3. If Hosea is comparing Israel's transgression of the Mosaic covenant with that of Adam's covenantal transgression in 6:7, what covenant did Adam transgress? How does viewing Adam as treacherous illuminate the dynamics of Gn 3? In what covenantal relationship to Yahweh do you now live as a Christian (Mt 26:28; Lk 22:20; 1 Co 11:25; 2 Co 3:6; He 8:8f; 9:15)? What instead of treachery that should characterize living properly in covenantal relationship with Yahweh then and now (6:4, 6)? How does this reflect Yahweh's own character (Ex 34:6)?
4. What political references to Israel's internal and external chaotic situation can you detect in chs. 7f? To what situations that you have read about in Kings and Chronicles do they refer? Should Christians be concerned about as much about politics today as Hosea was then? Why? How can appropriate involvement in politics be a legitimate form of Christian spirituality? Nevertheless, how could political involvement become a substitute for true spirituality? How does your own particular Christian ministry intersect with the social, political and economic issues of contemporary society?
5. How aptly does Ga 6:7f succinctly capture the common relationship between sinning and its consequence described in 8:1-7? How true have you found this connection to be in your own experience? What have you learned from your experiences? Why?

1. What retributions will Yahweh bring on Israel [Ephraim (10:6; 11:8)] for her many sins? How will each sin affect the people? What literary images are used to present these sins and their consequences? How relevant is all this to Christians today? Why do you think Assyria is identified with Egypt in 11:11, but not in 11:5?
2. What notorious examples of Israel's past sinning are their present sins compared to in chs 9f (Nu 25; Jg 19f; 1 S 15)? Of what past great judgments are they also reminded (10:14; 11:8; Dt 29:22f)? How many of Hosea's references are not as clear to you, and even to modern historical scholars, as they would have been to his audience then? Will this probably be just as true of contemporary and historical references of present-day preachers for many future readers of their published sermons even a generation from now, let alone over two and a half millennia on? Why are such apparently obscure references in our Bible then? Who was the Bible written for anyway (Is 55:10-13)? Why do we read it carefully today (Ro 15:4)?
3. What relationship do Israel's sins bear to her affluence and strengths? How true is this in your own life and experience? Why do you think this is so? What personal lesson can you draw from this? Is it also true of Christian congregations? What lesson could your congregation draw from this? How could one be as prepared for the greater temptations of affluence and strength as for those of adversity and weakness (Ph 4:11-13; 1 Ti 6:6-11; 2 Co 12:9f)?
4. How did Israel's actions compare to what Yahweh wanted from his covenant people (10:12f)? How different is it for the people of God within the new covenant [testament]? What consequences were, therefore, to follow for Israel (10:14f)? In what way might this apply to Christians?
5. What evidence is there in ch. 11 that punishing his people is a great agony for Yahweh? What does this lead him to do? How are Yahweh's love and judgement related (Ek 18:23; Jn 3:16f; 1 Ti 2:4; 4:10; He 12:7; 2 P 3:9)? How have you personally experienced this in your relationship to God? Are your own loving and judging similarly related? To what extent should we expect God to be like us, or us like him (11:9; Is 55:8f)? When God and humans are compared biblically, who is the exemplar? For example, with respect to fatherhood, would you really want God to be just like your human father, however good he may be? Why? What happens to your relationship with God, when you do project the image of your father onto him? How can this very common human theological tendency be corrected (Ro 8:14-16; 12:2; Ga 4:6f; Ep 3:14f)? How do the following scriptures provide appropriate, divinely authorized checks and balances for making any divine-human comparisons/ analogies/ metaphors: Ex 34:6f; Jn 1:14; 8:19; 12:44f; 14:6-9; Cl 1:15; He 1:1-3?

1. According to Hosea ch. 12, how is Israel/ Ephraim in the 8th century BC much like their ancestor Israel/ Jacob a millennium earlier? How like your ancestors are you? How much spiritual progress has your family made, even in recent memory, let alone over the centuries? What biblical warrant is there for the modern belief in human progress, let alone in its inevitability? How pervasive and influential is this optimistic ideal in your culture? Where might it have come from?
2. In ch. 13, what are the four descriptions of God's judgement on Israel? What reasons are given for Yahweh's judgement? What can these teach us about the nature of sin and divine judgement? What might this mean in your life? In your congregation's life?
3. According to 14:1-3 does true returning/ repentance to Yahweh involve beyond what Israel had thought (6: 1-6)? Why do we find that so difficult? How is it even possible for us (Zc 12:10; Ac 11:18; Ro 2:4; Ph 2:12f; 2 Ti 2:25)? What is Yahweh's response to true repentance (14:4-8)? According to Hosea, what is Yahweh's dominant characteristic (3:1; 11:4; 14:4)? What does that mean to you (14:9)?
4. How can anything created by human beings, even by our imaginations and hopes, really be the God who created everything, including us (8:6; 13:2; 14:3; Ro 1:18-23)? Yet, what sorts of idolatry continue to exist even in our "enlightened" age? How many otherwise brilliant people write books about the sort of God they imagine, want, or prefer [could believe in]? Why? Could this also apply to the sorts of god/ gods that many atheists claim they can't believe in? How can rampant idolatry be combated and corrected today?
5. In light of Hosea's direct and indirect references to prophets (4:5; 6:5; 9:7f; 11:2,7; 12:10, 13), how does he seem to understand the character, role and success of Yahweh's prophets in Israel? How much of this might come out of his own experience as described in chs. 1-3?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 27: 2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28.:1-27 & 2 Kings 17:1-41.

1. What were the many sins of Ahaz according to Kings, Chronicles and Is 7:1-20? How far did his political maneuvers get him and Judah (2K 16:9; 2 Ch 28:16, 20)? How did these sins and maneuvers affect (a) God, (b) God's people and (c) Ahaz himself? When have you been most tempted to think that your choices, behaviours and activities impacted only yourself? What counter evidence do even you have for this? What should that mean for you in your future choices, behaviours and actions?
2. What may we learn from the impact made by Oded as Yahweh's prophet in that crisis? Why weren't prophets of God usually so well-heeded in Israel itself? Why do you think it was different this time? What were Oded's arguments? Why were they cogent then? Are they to you? Why? Have there been any similar situations in your life experience?
3. How well were the Judean refugees treated? How well do Christians treat refugees today? What more could we do? What more should we do? How can and may Christian refugees themselves be great missionaries to new areas (Ac 8:1, 4f; 11:19-21; 18:2f, 26)? How important are refugee and immigrant Christian missionaries even to traditional Christian countries and churches today? How important are they to your congregation and denomination? How much do you appreciate their spiritual contributions?
4. What was the progressive deterioration of Israel's moral and spiritual life over the centuries (2K 17:7-18)? How far had Judah also gone in the same direction? What were the consequences in Hoshea's reign, in spite of his own somewhat lesser sins (2K 17:2)? Why do you think he was so foolish politically in dealing with an Assyria that was more interested in tribute than in territory? What can we learn from such foolishness today, spiritually as well as politically?
5. Does the syncretistic [mixed] religion of the displaced pagan ancestors of the Samaritans help explain why later Jews despised them (Jn 4:9)? How frequently do you find this mix-and-match approach to theology, spirituality and worship in many contemporary forms of Christianity? Besides immigration, what could be some of the causes of this? Did the religious remedy tried by the Assyrian king really help (2 K 17:24-41)? Why? What would have been a more effective remedy (2 Ch 30:1-11, 17, 26; 31:f)? In Yahweh's view, why is syncretism worse than pure paganism (2 K 17:33f, 40f)? In a pluralistic society, what is wrong with it, and for whom? Must religious toleration and freedom inevitably lead to religious relativism and syncretism (Gn 14:18-20; 2 K 5:18; Ac 14:15-18; 17:17-34; Ro 1 & 2; 1` Co 7:12-16; 1 Co 8:5f; 1 Co 6:14-18)? ? How, then, should Christians relate to people of other faiths? Where do religious truth claims fit in (Jn 1:4f, 14; 14:6; Ac 4:12; Ro 1:18-26; Ga 1:8f; 1 Co 13:6; Ep 4:15; 1Ti 2:1-5; 3 Jn 3, 8, 12; Jd 3)? 1 Ti 2:1-5; In 14:6; Ac 4:12)? How important to you is the truth about God? How do you sort out such truth claims (Jn 19:37f; Ga 1:8,9)?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 28: 2 Kings 18:1-12 & 2 Chronicles 29:1-31:21.

1. How true of you personally are the attitudes and conduct of Hezekiah in his first few years as king (2 K 18:1-12)? How did his faith show itself in action? How does yours? How did he know that he had Yahweh's favour and blessing? How do you know when you have his favour and blessing? How do 2K 18:5, 2 Ch 29:2 and 31:20f catch the heart of Hezekiah's early dedication to Yahweh? How similar should a Christian's dedication to Yahweh be (Dt 6:5; Jr 2:2; Mt 24:12; Ro 12:11; 1 Co 10:31; 2 Co 5:14f; Cl 3:17, 23f; Rv 2:4)?
2. Which of the many aspects of Hezekiah's reformation does the Chronicler focus upon almost exclusively? Why do you think the priests, rather than the Levites, dragged their feet a little in this reformation (2 Ch 29:34; 2 K 16:10-16)? Who is it that most frequently resists biblical reformation of the church today? Why? On the other hand, how were Hezekiah and the earlier prophets co-operating with Yahweh in their different ministries here? How do 2 Ch 30:12 & 32:71 illustrate the same divine-human co-operative approach of Hezekiah and his people?
3. Why, in spite of all the efforts made to celebrate the Passover festival rigorously, did exceptions have to be made? What do 2 Ch 20:34; 30:2f, 17ff, 23 & 31:16 indicate about Yahweh's and Hezekiah's approach to legal regulations (Nu 9:11f)? What should our Christian approach be to biblical regulations (Mt 5:17-48; 12:1-8; Ro 2:27-29; 7:6; 2 Co 3:6)? Why (Ro 2:29; 1 Co 4:3-5; Ga 3:24-29; Cl 2:13-3:3; Ep 2:8-10)?
4. Is there a clear reference to the existence and use in public worship of a collection of David's and Asaph's psalms in 2 Ch 29:29f? If so, what implications does this have for ascertaining the provenance and dating of at least parts of the Book of Psalms?
5. How successful was Hezekiah's attempt to involve his northern relations [the Israelites who still remained in the north (2 Ch 30:5) and those of them who had earlier moved south into Judah (2 Ch 30:25)] in his revival of the Unleavened Bread and Passover festivals? What main argument did he use with them? What was its scriptural basis (Ex 34:61; Dt 4:27-29; 30:2f)? Have you tried to do similar things with your religiously-estranged relatives? With what arguments and success? Why do you think it was that the few Israelites who did respond to Hezekiah's invitation to join in the common worship of the ancient festivals, became the most zealous promoters of extending the religious reformation throughout Judah as well as back home in Israel's old territory (2 Ch 31:1)? Does this in any way help motivate you to try to involve your religiously estranged relatives in your congregation's public worship? What renewal of your congregation's worship patterns might facilitate this inclusion? What do you know about more recent examples of how much the revived zeal in a few people can accomplish spiritually in a community? Have you ever been so involved yourself? How so? To what effect?

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH.

Isaiah, 'the evangelical prophet', began his ministry in Judah at the end of Uzziah's reign, and it continued through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Is 1:1). An ancient Jewish tradition, possibly alluded to in He 11:37, has him slain by being sawn in half during Manasseh's terrible reign. If this is so then his prophetic ministry spanned 40-60 years. He was certainly a man of outstanding faith in Yahweh who had a great influence upon his fellow-countrymen. He seems to have been well at home in both the court and temple, and was probably a Jerusalemite, possibly even of noble birth.

He had to contend with many difficulties in Judah, for the moral and spiritual conditions of the people were corrupt. The rich oppressed the poor and reveled in wanton luxury; justice was shamelessly bought and sold. When in distress, people turned to idols; when in danger, they sought political alliances with pagan powers. Isaiah, however, urged a quiet faith in Yahweh as the only secure path. When, in the extreme crisis of the Assyrian invasion in 701 BC, his advice was followed by Hezekiah, it was triumphantly vindicated in the destruction of the Assyrian army.

While Isaiah spoke much of impending judgement, he foresaw also the coming of God's Messiah and the establishment of his Messianic kingdom. His interest was not confined to Judah alone, for he prophesied concerning Israel, whose overthrow he witnessed, and even the surrounding pagan nations.

The last 27 chapters (40-66) contain a very remarkable collection of prophecies spoken primarily for the warning and comfort of the people of God who would live during the exile in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem about 160 years after Isaiah's own time. In other visions, recorded earlier in his book (e.g., 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10; 35; 39:6), he had already foreseen the rise of Babylon to power and glory, her downfall and the release of her Jewish captives. But these striking later prophecies present Yahweh's glad message of redemption much more fully and are vividly addressed to the poor exiles as if by a contemporary prophet. The relevance of the details and the contemporary character of these prophecies to the exiles, have led many modern biblical scholars to view the latter half of the book as the product of one or more later prophets following in Isaiah's school of prophecy. However, both ancient Jewish tradition [including the Dead Sea Scrolls] and the New Testament writers treat the book as a unity coming from the pen of the 8th century BC Isaiah.

We, however, are reading the book in three sections, because of the immediate relevance to three periods of Israel's history: the Divided Kingdom (chs. 1-23), the Kingdom of Judah (chs. 24-39) and the Exile and Post-exile (chs. 40-66). This, however, does not necessarily imply that there were originally three books that were assembled together by a later editor. Unless one believes *a priori* that prophecies can't truly be predictive, then the date of their primary relevance need not determine the date of their origin. There are far too many signs of the book's unity at many levels for that scenario to be likely. Furthermore, biblical prophets frequently foretell as well as forth-tell God's message, even in the New Testament (e.g., Ac 11:27f 21:10-14). Indeed, successful foretelling is one of the characteristic marks of a true prophet of Yahweh (Dt 13:1-5; 18:21; 1 S 3:19; 1 K 22:28; Jr 28:9; 29:9).

ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH:

1-39	Judgement:	Divided Kingdom [HTB V]
1-12	Judah's sins.	
13-23	Judgement of the nations.	
24-27	Yahweh's purpose in judgement.	Kingdom of Judah [HTB VI]
28-35	Warning against human efforts for salvation.	
36-39	Historical interlude.	
40-66	Comfort:	Exile and Post Exile [HTB VII]
40-48	Deliverance.	
49-59	Expiation.	
60-66	Glory.	

1. How does Isaiah keep our minds fixed on who it is who is speaking through all of his oracles? What names does Isaiah use for God here? Keep a list of God's names as used throughout the entire book, in order to see which ones are characteristic of the book as a whole and/or one of its sub-sections. What do each of the literal meaning of the names used in this opening section, imply about God and his relationship to his people and his world? How do you usually address God in your private prayers? Why? Are you conscious of these names' literal meanings when you are using them? Do you employ different names for God in public? What might this imply about your relationship to him?
2. In light of the positive and negative language, metaphors and similes used by Isaiah to talk about that relationship here, what is the relationship of Judah to Yahweh?
3. What are the sins of Judah [often called "Israel" by Isaiah, perhaps because that was all of the original Israel that remained in the land]? How serious are they? How is this made vividly clear by Isaiah in several ways? Which way of speaking of their sins is most relevant to you personally? Are Christians today any less sinners than God's people were then? How can our sinners be helped to appreciate how Yahweh views our sins? What can be done about our sinful state?
4. Are our present Christian formal religious activities any less nauseating to Yahweh than Judah's were then (1:13, 15-17)? Why? From God's point of view, what can be done to improve them? What might this imply for the spiritual renewal/ reform of your congregation? How might that be possible?
5. What are the dual purposes of Yahweh's judgement (1:19f; He 12:5-11)? How is it determined which edge of the sword of judgement touches whom (1:27f)? How much more good does God's discipline do for us than it seemed to have done Judah? According to this chapter, how open is Yahweh to his people's renewal? Does this motivate you to change? What are the consequences of non-renewal? How does this motivate you? What might motivate you to change? Why?

1. What are the basic elements of the hope for Judah and Jerusalem in the last days, which are presented in 2:2-4 and 4:2-6 as the frame for Isaiah's vision concerning Jerusalem and Judah? How universal is it? How do both 2:4 and Mi 4:6 reverse the processes of Jl 3:1f)? Can their order be reconciled to Joel by considering their different contexts? How does this state of affairs fit into the common Christian understanding of the last things [eschatology]? How central is Yahweh himself to Judah's hope? To the Christian hope (Tt 3:13)? Which aspects of Judah's hope appeals to you most? What are the elements of your hope?
2. What basic human sins are condemned in chs. 2 & 3? Are the same sins still common among God's people today? How appropriate were God's judgments then? Should we expect him to deal with the same sins in a similar way today? According to Isaiah, what are the most relevant characteristics of Yahweh in this judgement? How relevant are these same characteristics of God to you?
3. To what extent is 2:22a (Gn 2:7; 1:20; 9:10, 12) an adequate answer to the question of 2:22b? What would be a much better biblical answer (Gn 1:26f; 9:6)? Yet, who/ what is humanity in comparison to the majestic and terrible Yahweh (Is 2:10, 19, 21)? Why, then, would Yahweh single out weak humanity from among his amazing creatures for his special attention, let alone share with them his sovereign enterprise in his world (Ps 8:4)?
4. With what aspects of 3:1-7 might your Christian congregation identify? How so?
5. Why does Yahweh seem so hard on the women of Judah (3:12, 16-4:2)? How relevant might this evaluation be today? Have the range of women's adornments changed much over the millennia? What should be the true beauty/ adornment of God's people (1 Ti 2:9f; 1 P3:3-5; Tt 2:3-5)? What does this mean in practice?

1. How does Isaiah's song of the vineyard (5:1-7) compare with Jesus' parables of the wicked husbandmen (Mt 12:1-9) and of the barren fig tree (Lk 13:6-9)? In spite of the differences, what great lesson is taught by all three? How can this lesson be applied in the lives of Christian individuals and congregations today? What does Jn 15:1-12 add? How does Yahweh cultivate you and your congregation? What fruit does he want you to bear? How is that possible? How relevant is Isaiah's question in 5:4 to you and your congregation?
2. In your own words, what are the particular unjust and unrighteous practices in Judah/Israel, Yahweh's vineyard (5:7), against which the six woes of 5:8-23 are pronounced? How far do these practices still infect not only present-day society, but also our Christian churches? Why do you think Yahweh is concerned about such matters? Are you too? What should God's people be doing about them? If we don't deal with them, what according to Isaiah should we expect from Yahweh, because we are his people?
3. When and why are you tempted to think or speak as in 5:19? What do you make of the responses of 2 P 3:3-15 to such mockery of Yahweh?
4. How serious is the fourth woefulness (5:20; Mt 12:30-37)? How prevalent is this mentality in our relativistic age? Could this be part of what Jesus had in mind in Mt 6:22f & Lk 11:34f? What/ who are the true standards of good and evil, light and darkness (Mk 10:18; Lk 6:35f; Ep 5:1f; 1 Jn 1:5-7; Ja 1:16f)? What are the implications of this for you and your congregation? What will it mean for your world in the final divine analysis?
5. What images are used here to portray Yahweh's sovereign control of the nations of Assyria and Babylon as instruments of judgments on his people (5:26-30)? What do these images convey to you? What more contemporary images might communicate this theme more effectively to your own people today? How does God work through the nations today to discipline his people? Who can help Christians truly see where, when, how and why Yahweh's hand is so at work today?

1. What does Yahweh's holiness mean to you? How do you imagine it in your mind? Has it for you the connections with his sovereignty [Lord, throne, King], majesty, height and glory that it had for Isaiah? What important role did the smoke/ cloud play in the revelation [unveiling/ disclosure] of Yahweh's holiness? What does an experience of his holiness make you conscious of? Is that the same thing that it made Isaiah so acutely aware of? Was Isaiah's and his people's uncleanness (6:5) fundamentally a matter of their iniquity and sinfulness? Even after their divinely instituted removal and forgiveness (6:7), what would still remain in the relationship with Yahweh that had to do with the essence of God's holiness? How would you describe this? What would be appropriate ways for humans to respond to it?
2. What are the close interconnections between (a) the particular inadequacy that Isaiah felt most aware in himself and his people, (b) Yahweh's way symbolic way of dealing with this inadequacy and (c) Isaiah's calling by Yahweh to be his spokesman [prophet] to his people? What are the connections between (a) the inadequacy that you are most conscious of before God's holiness, (b) your personal experience of his special healing/ cleansing and (c) your calling to a particular sphere of Christian ministry/ service? How does your sense of personal forgiveness motivate you to respond to God's call to a particular ministry as his agent? Why do you think God so often calls people to minister in the very areas in which he has helped them face and deal with their real limitations (2 Co 1:3-5)? How are our human strengths and weaknesses interconnected in God's economy? Why (Zc 4:6; 1 Co 1:26-31; 2 Co 12:5-10)? How does that relate to you?
3. What would the basic message of Yahweh in 6:9f that Isaiah was to deliver to his people, sound like in your own words (43:8)? What do you think it means? How do the prophets Jeremiah (Jr 5:20-24) and Ezekiel (Ek 12:2) later express this same theme? How does Jesus' quotation of Isaiah's words help (Mk 4:10-12)? What light does Jn 3:16-21 throw on it? How did Paul apply the theme to the Jews of his day (Ac 28:24-28)? How applicable is Isaiah's message to you and to God's people today?
4. Has Isaiah's question in 6:11 ever been yours? How do you like and respond to Yahweh's answer? How might 2 P 3:3-15 help you understand and respond appropriately?
5. What note of hope is sounded in 6:13? How do you think Isaiah will expand this hopeful note throughout the rest of his prophecy? Check out how accurate your prediction is as you read the rest of his prophecies in their most relevant contexts while you traverse the rest of this trail and the next two trails.

1. According to 2K 16:51 and 2 Ch 28:151, what was the international situation that Isaiah is speaking to in 7:1-10:4? Were the king of Judah [house of David] and his people justified in how they felt about this dual threat? What exactly did they fear would happen? Was Ahaz, therefore, justified in his refusal to name a sign or to test Yahweh? Other than rebuking him, how does Yahweh respond to Ahaz's lack of faith in him? What can you learn from Ahaz's bad example? How differently would you have acted in those circumstances?
2. In your own words, what are the basic elements in Yahweh's message through Isaiah to Ahaz in ch. 7? How would you like to be the carrier of such a message to your sovereign, especially if he were one like Ahaz? Imagine how Isaiah's first son felt publicly bearing the personal name "Shearjashub", in spite of its relatively positive meaning ["a remnant shall return"]
3. How does the enacted and witnessed prophetic message of 8:1-4 (a) reinforce Yahweh's basic message to Ahaz in ch. 7 and (b) underline the prophetic importance of the given name of Isaiah's second son? What would be the effect of regularly hearing this name and knowing its meaning on Ahaz? How did the prophecy to Judah in 8:6-8 continue to reinforce and clarify this message? What was the historical importance of the name "Immanuel [God with us]" to Judah and the surrounding nations (Gn 28:15; 31:3; Ex 3:12; 33:1-3, 12, 14-17; 34:9-11; Dt 4:37f; 31:6-8; Js 1:5,9)? How significant is that same name for Christians (Mt 18:20; 28:20; Ac 18:10; He 13:5f)? However, do that name and its inherent promises encourage you to trust regularly and practically in God's presence (Nu 6:22-27) any more than it did repeatedly for Israel (Ex 17:7; Nu 14:22; Ps 95:6-9; Is 63:8-14)? Why? Who are addressed in 8:9f and what should be the significance of "Immanuel" to them? Why?
4. In light of the context of chs. 7 & 8, who might the forthcoming child/ son of the 7:14-16 prophecy have been in that day? How did Mt 1:21-23 interpret Is 7:14 with respect to Jesus of Nazareth? How does this illustrate the multi-level nature of some Old Testament prophecy? How easy, however, is it to understand prophecy's fuller meaning when it is first delivered? In Mt 1:21-25, how closely does the meaning of the name "Immanuel" seem to be connected (a) with the prophetic significance of the name "Jesus/ Joshua" ["Yahweh saves"] as well as with (b) to Mary's and Joseph's sexual abstinence prior to Jesus' birth? Does the name "Jesus" help you keep Jesus closely connected in your mind with Yahweh's presence and gracious activity?
5. What was the import of the special, powerful, personal message Yahweh gave to his prophet in such tense circumstances (8:11-15)? How often is it necessary for God's messengers/ servants "to march to a different drummer" than their contemporaries? What is the appropriate response to Yahweh's holiness? What is the result of such a response? What, however, would be the result of other less appropriate responses, even for God's people? How does 1 P 3:13-17 apply this theme to suffering Christians in the 1st century AD? What relevance does this have to you in your own circumstances? How can you become a faithful witness to Yahweh's holiness?

1. Why do some of God's people here feel, speak and act like rank pagans when Yahweh seems to have hidden his face by withdrawing access to his spokespersons (8:16-22)? How many Christians do the much the same today, following the examples of their pagan neighbours' spirituality and rage? Is it because they too "have no dawn"? What does Isaiah propose that he and his family/ disciples do during such times? How is hope pursued in waiting/ looking eagerly for Yahweh in times of abandonment? How relevant is this to the church today (1 P 4:13-19; 2 P 3:3-18)?
2. What appropriate comfort might God's people, in the dark days of king Herod's reign under the Romans, find in Isaiah's messianic message of hope through "Galilee of the Gentiles" during the dark days of Ahaz' reign (Is 9:2-7; Mt 4:14-16; Lk 1:78f)? What future great dawning should all Christians today be waiting for with joyous anticipation in our dark times (2 P 1:16, 19; 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:16, 20)? How should we live in light of our "blessed hope" (Tt 2:11-14)? What aspect of Isaiah's characterization of God's Messiah's reign is most attractive to you?
3. How appropriate is it that such a tremendous hope should be centred on a mere human child (Ps 8:2)? But how could any mere human child be all that Is 9:6f claims for this special child from Yahweh? According to 9:7 and Lk 1:31-37, what makes this impossibility possible? How could anyone view this particular prophecy as other than about a coming of God's Messiah [Anointed One], great David's Greater Son? Which messianic coming (Lk 1:32f Ac 1:1f)?
4. What basic message from Yahweh does Isaiah give to the king of Israel as his people seek to bounce back from defeat (9:8-21)? Why is Yahweh so angry with them, even with their marginalized members (9:17)? Why could some of this be applicable to some of God's people today? Could 9:17b well be added to Paul's long list of Old Testament references about the universality of human sinning (Ro 3:10-18)?
5. How are the people of Judah any less wicked than their Israelite cousins (10:14)? Is this true of some Christians today as much as of our pagan cousins? How can those of us who are so involved respond to the question of 10:3 other than by what is recommended in 10:4? What can we do about the particular evils in our society listed here, especially if they infect Christian's behaviour too? How can we be God's true people today?

1. How do the alternating views of Yahweh (10:5f, 12, 15-19) and the Assyrian King (10:7-10, 13) of Assyria's planned invasion of Judah compare? How can this dual perspective help us begin to understand how a righteous God can employ evil people and nations to accomplish his good purposes (Hb 1:12-2:4)? What, if anything, might this imply about human freedom of choice; purpose and action (10:7)?
2. How does your own way of measuring success compare to Assyria's (10:8-11, 13f)? For Christians, however, what other factors have to be considered in evaluating whether we or our congregation have really been successful? With this in mind, how do you and your congregation rate in terms of success?
3. Why should Yahweh's people not be afraid of great powers, like Assyria, that oppress and seek to destroy them? If you had lived in any of the towns surrounding Jerusalem [Zion] (10:28-32), how might you have felt about Assyria's impending, attack on the capital itself? What comfort would you find in Isaiah's pertinent prophecies (7:3ff; 10:21, 24f, 27)? Why?
4. What do you learn about the remnant in 10:20-25? How does Paul use this passage in Ro 9:27f and 11:5? What other vivid metaphors do you find in ch. 10? How well do they illustrate the actions (a) of Judah's leaders, (b) of the Assyrian kings and (c) of Yahweh? If 10:28-32 describes the relentless approach of the Assyrian army from the north, what might 10:32-34 refer (2 K 18:17-19:37)?
5. What could be Yahweh's purposes in chastising people for a while, then or now (Ro 8:3-5; Ja 1:2-4, 12-18; He 2: 10f, 18; 5:7-9; 12:3-11; 1 P 1:3-9, 1-16)? How do you appreciate and respond to his purposes? What better methods might you recommend? Why?

1. What are to be the characteristics of God's Messiah who is to be the shoot/ branch out of Jesse's [David's father] stem/ root? How will his great reign impact human society (11:2-5), nature (11:6-9) and Israel's and Judah's future (11:10-16)? To what extent is this a development of Isaiah's earlier picture of the Davidic Messiah (9:1-7), especially as expressed the young Messiah's amazing names?
2. What do you make of Isaiah's speaking of the Spirit of Yahweh coming (a) upon the Davidic Messiah here (11:2), (b) upon the (Suffering) Servant of Yahweh in 42:1 and (c) upon Yahweh's Messiah in 61:1? Are all of these references to the same event and Messiah? Could all these be predictions of what John the Baptist witnessed at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:21f; Jn 1:32-34)? What else is possible or probable?
3. How significant is it that the vision of the future includes both the reconciliation of Israel and Judah (11:13) plus a new exodus [going out from slavery] (11:15f)? When did that new exodus/ return of a remnant of God's people (11:1) take place historically? Could there also be a reference to a further new exodus/ return of Yahweh's people from their wide dispersion "to the corners of the earth" "on *that day*" (11:11f)? When might that happen? Has it begun? What phenomena will indicate that it has happened (11:13-16)?
4. In what ways can you join in Judah's song of thanksgiving in 12:1-3? Which aspects of Yahweh's deliverance have you already personally experienced through his Messiah? Which aspects do you still look forward to, and give thanks for now? How important among the nations was God's personal name, "Yahweh" in *that day*? Why? What aspects of his character (12:4-6) give rise to Zion's "Hallelujah Praise Yah(weh)! Chorus"? How should such praise be expressed?
5. Is there in 12:4f a call to a worldwide heralding of Yahweh's salvation to all peoples of the earth? How might experiencing the greatness of the Holy One of Israel among his people, motivate this proclamation of good news [evangelism] far and wide? Might this experience and mission apply to Christian congregations today as well as to Zion? What does the phrase "in/ on *that day*" imply about timing?

1. In your own words, what would the day of Yahweh mean for Babylon (13:1-14:2)? How is Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations presented here? What instruments will he use to accomplish his judgement on Babylon (13:3, 5, 13, 17) then? How does this illustrate the divine-human synergy/ partnership involved in Yahweh's exercising his sovereignty (Ps 8) in the international sphere of history? In comparison to what "soon" was specified to be for Moab (16:14), how soon would "soon" be for Babylon (13:22), when it fell to the Medes and Persians in October 539 BC (Dn 5:30f)? What light does this throw upon both the elasticity of the word "soon" in prophecy, and also the predictive/ foretelling dimension of prophecy?
2. How important is it to modern readers that Isaiah dates some of his oracles fairly exactly [e.g., 6:1 in 739 BC and 14:28 in 716 BC]? Why is it so important that the prophets' messages were so tightly connected with the history of their times? How does this connection relate to their predictions of future historical events, e.g., the breaking of Assyria in Yahweh's land in 701 BC, probably over 15 years after Isaiah's prophecy in 14:25?
3. What are the responses of the living (14:5-8) and dead (14:9-21; 19:4, 23:5,14) to the fall and demise of the great king of Babylon? How is the rise and fall this great Babylonian king's a fitting symbol of the evil one himself (14:12-21; 2 Th 2:3f)?
4. How do all of these oracles against the nations in chs. 12-23 reveal Yahweh as the King of Jews, the All-sovereign and All-powerful [mighty] God? How does Isaiah in 14:24-27 make the important distinction between Yahweh's sovereignty [e.g. his intention, his plan] and his power [his out-stretched hand]? Are the two, nevertheless, connected here? Is one derived from, or dependent upon, the other? How so?
5. What future is seen for Israel and Judah in these oracles (14:1f; 16:1-5)? What role does Yahweh want his people to play when devastation strikes a neighbouring nation. Should Christians today be far more active in this role? How?
6. How unusual is the value system of the Medes (13:17) among the nations then and now? What does your nation value most in theory? In practice? How do you function as a Christian in relation to your nation's value system? What are the consequences for you now and in eternity?

1. What is said here repeatedly about Yahweh's judgement being a means of motivating people from all nations to turn to him (17:7; 18:7; 19:18-22)? Do you expect any of God's present enemies to come and worship Him (Jo 3)? Why? Do you even want them to do so (Jo 4)? Why? How does Yahweh himself respond to their turning/repentance (19:24-29; 1 Ti 2:4-6; 2 Ti :L24-26; 2 P 3:9; Rv 2:21)? What motivation might this provide for international Christian evangelistic missions today?
2. How was Yahweh said to be at work in the history of other nations in Isaiah's time? How is he still working in the history of nations today? Are any of the images Isaiah uses to describe this divine activity helpful for describing what he is doing among the nations now? How do 19:20f & 24f illuminate how Yahweh views his relationship to the nations, even to Israel's traditional enemies? Is this true also of the nations today, even those that are far from being able to be called "Christian"? In what sense, then, is Israel special to Yahweh? How does the same distinction apply to Christians as the new "Israel of God" (Ga 6:16)?
3. Where would your nation turn, if your favorite supporting world power were, like Egypt then, to disintegrate under a combination of internal and external pressures? How would you interpret such an eventuality as a Christian? How did people in different parts of the world interpret the disintegration of the great USSR in recent times? Could Christians see God's hand in this? What was it a victory for, from a Christian point of view? Why?
4. How capable are today's "wise people" of predicting what will happen to the nations they know? How many foresaw the rather rapid collapse of the great USSR in 1989 (19:11f)? What caused the distorted view of reality that many wise people had in Isaiah's day (19:14)? Does this happen today? Why?
5. Which might 19:17-20 really be a prediction of: (a) a number of Jewish settlements in Egypt from the time of the 6th century B.C. Jewish exile to at least the 1st century AD, (b) the strong Christian presence in Egypt in the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, (c) Coptic Christian presence there down to our day, (d) Jesus' sojourn in Egypt as a child (Is 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; Ho 11:1; Mt 2:14-16, 19-21), (e) something else, or (f) all of the above? How could a *reader* then or now tell which? How much does it matter for our understanding what Isaiah was saying to his readers then?

1. Why do you think Yahweh asked the aristocratic prophet Isaiah to act out his message this way (20:24)? Was this built into his original prophetic call from God (6:8)? Would you be willing to sacrifice some measure of your comfort, pride and respectability to serve Yahweh in a similarly difficult ministry role? How often do you think Yahweh's servants should expect to be able to live comfortably in their society? What has this to do with your call to share Christ's ministry?
2. How well can you appreciate the poetry and imagery of the second prophetic oracle against Babylon in 21:1-10? What does it add to the first oracle of ch. 13?
3. In what two respects does 22:1-14 find fault with the leaders and people of Jerusalem during the siege (22:11-14)? To what extent do you find the same spirit prevalent today among God's people and their leaders? Why (Co 15:32)? Is such an attitude when expressed in non-threatening times, as in Is 56:12, any better? Why (Lk 12:19)?
4. What do you make of the divine evaluations and judgments of the two successive stewards of the king of Judah during the siege (22:15-22)? How responsibly do you handle positions of authority? How are authority and responsibility connected for anyone, God as well as humans? How does your relationship to God affect any position of authority you may hold (Ro 13:1-4)? How well do you handle criticism, whether human or divine, whether just or not?
5. Does Isaiah's oracle about Tyre, the centre of Phoenicia's prosperous Mediterranean commercial network, include any condemnation of their wealth, business, or beauty in and of themselves? What, then, is Yahweh against here? What is a proper Christian attitude to wealth and prosperity (Lk 6:24f; 12:12-34; 14:12; 18:23-27; 1 Ti 6:6-10, 17-19; He 13:5; Ja 2:1-9; 5:1-6)? What about proper Christian attitudes to beauty (Ex 35:4-36:7; Mk 13:1f; Lk 21:5f) and business (Ac 16:14f; 18:3)?

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH.

Micah was an 8th century BC contemporary of Isaiah. While Isaiah was a prophet of the court in Jerusalem, Micah came from Moresheth-gath (1:1, 14), a country town near the south-western boarder of Judah. Therefore, he frequently employs the pastoral image of a flock of sheep and its shepherd (2:12; 3:2f; 4:6, 8; 7:14). He is naturally very concerned about the impact of Yahweh's judgement on the villages and towns of his home region (1:10-16). His protests against the oppression and exploitation of the poor and underprivileged show signs of the conviction and vehemence of someone who identifies with their lot. He, like Amos, was probably not a professional prophet, and is quite critical of them (2:6; 3:5, 11). But, like Isaiah, he staunchly upholds the covenant, defends Israel's historic faith and prophesies to both Judah [Jerusalem] and Israel [Samaria] (1:1).

Micah's prophetic activity began during that of Hosea's, so there are many traces in his book of the influence on him of both Hosea and Isaiah (e.g., compare Mi 1:7 with Ho 2:13; 8:6; 9:1; and Mi 4:1-3 & 7:1 with Is 2:2-4 & 24:13). Yet Micah was no plagiarizer, for he had his own message. He exercised a profound influence not only in his own day, but also a century later in Jeremiah's time (Jr 26:16-19). His message was well remembered in Jesus' time (e.g., Mt 2:6; Jn 7:42), and is still relevant today.

Rather than being organized chronologically like Isaiah, and possibly Hosea; Micah's book is arranged thematically, balancing messages of doom and hope throughout.

ANALYSIS OF MICAH.

1:1	Introduction:
1:2-2-13	Part one:
1:2-2:11	1 st message of doom.
2:12f	1 st message of hope.
3:1-5:15	Part two:
3:1-12	2 nd message of doom.
4:1-5:15	2 nd message of hope:
4:11-5:1	The Messianic kingdom.
5:2-15	The Messianic king and victory.
6:1-7:20	Part three:
6:1-7:6	3 rd message of doom.
7:7-20	3 rd message of hope.

1. What seems to be the implication of Micah calling Jerusalem “Judah's high place” in parallel to Samaria being called “Israel's rebellion” (1:5)? How is this clarified immediately by his focus on Samaria's judgement because of her adulterous idolatry? Should Jerusalem and Judah suffer any less judgement (1:8f)?
2. For what specific sins are Israel and Judah, and their respective capitals, going to suffer in the impending Assyrian invasion (ch. 2)? How prone are we Christians to these very sins today? Which ones especially? What classes in the community are rebuked most? Why is this not just an expression of Micah's own class perspective? What great sufferings result from their actions (2:2, 8f)? How does Yahweh judge them (2:3f; 3:5-7)?
3. Have you or your leaders ever asked questions similar to those of 2:7 and 3:11? What attitudes do they express? What are the concerns of Yahweh cited in this section? How relevant are they to you and your fellow Christians?
4. Who speaks of Yahweh's concerns to your churches and society these days? Would your society and churches respond to Yahweh's prophet's message of judgement any differently than the people of Micah's day did (2:3f, 6)? What would be the consequences if Yahweh's prophets hushed their sharp messages of judgement (2:5f)? What much more popular, but lying, messages we might prefer from our prophets (2:11; 3:11)?
5. How firm is the first brief pastoral glimpse of hope and deliverance (2:12f)? How far would it sustain you when faced with the more extensive message of doom and judgement? What more would you hope to hear from Yahweh your God?

1. Why does Micah attack Judah's rulers, prophets and priests so vigorously in ch. 3 and 5:10-15? What graphic images does he employ to express Yahweh's criticisms and judgments? What will be the consequences of their lifestyles? What warnings do you see here for the leaders of God's people today? How so?
2. How does the promise of Yahweh quoted in 3:11 relate to the Immanuel theme we saw earlier in Is 7? What good does it do to quote and rely upon such a great promise of Yahweh, when the conditions he set for it are ignored or even forgotten (Ex 34:12-17, 27; Dt 4:39f; 31:9-13; Js 1:6-9)? How frequently do Christians today appropriate only what we like in the God's biblical revelation, and even then disregard whatever associated conditions there may be in the contexts (e.g., 2 Ch 7:4 within the context of vtl.12-22)?
3. How might you describe in your own words Micah's vision of the Messianic kingdom (4:1-8; 5:5-9) and its king (5:2-5) coming after the judgment of exile (4:6)? How might the two prophet's descriptions relate to such familiar Judaic songs of worship as Ps 46, 48 & 76? How many contrasts are there between this coming age and Micah's own age as Yahweh saw it?
4. What was the common contemporary context for both Micah's (4:3) and Isaiah's (2:4) prophetic reversal of Joel's earlier prophecy about swords and plowshares (Jl 3:10)? How had the context, and therefore the message, switched from Joel's day? Does it matter whether it was Isaiah or Micah who first thought it was then contextually appropriate to reverse Joel's famous saying? How often do we today often remember, or even care, who first aptly articulated appropriate the wisdom for our time, let alone remember how it relates to the wisdom of another time and place?
5. What do you make of the prediction that the coming Messianic king will be born in David's insignificant hometown of Bethlehem (5:2-5)? Why do you think that detail was so well remembered in Jesus' day by both biblical scholars (Mt 2:4-6; Jn 7:52), ordinary people (Jn 1:46; 7:41f) and God himself (Lk 2:1-15)? What does this illustrate about true Spirit-empowered (Mi 3:8) prophetic prediction (Dt 18:22; 1 S 3:19; 9:6; 1 K 22:24, 28; Jr 28:9)? What do you make of the prediction of Mi 4:10, in spite of the fact that the enemy of that day was clearly acknowledged to be Assyria (5:5f), and not Babylon for a great many years yet?
6. How could the remnant of Jacob be among the nations both like dew from Yahweh (5:7) and also like a raging lion (5:8)? How does that relate to the same historical act of Yahweh bringing both blessing and judgement to a people?

TRAIL V -- SECTION 42: Micah 6:1-7:20.

1. In the third message of doom (6:1-16), presented as a court scene at the city's gates, what are (a) the witnesses cited [rather than the many heavenly and earthly gods as with the other peoples of the ancient Near East (Is 1:2)], (b) the parties in the case [the plaintiff, the accused, the prosecution, the judge, the defence], (c) the charges made, (d) the evidence of Yahweh's faithfulness submitted and (e) the judgments rendered?
2. What relevance does Yahweh's own charge against Israel have for the Christian church today? Have we grown weary of Yahweh (6:3; Mt 24:12; Jr 2:2; Rv 2:4)? Is that Yahweh's fault?
3. What do you make of the great difference between what God's people offer as atonement gifts (6:6f) and what Yahweh himself requires of them (6:8)? Does God still require of Christians what he required of his people then? Is there still such a great difference today between what we tend to offer God and what he says he requires? What does this imply for the renewal of the church today? What about for the renewal of individual Christians?
4. Has there ever been a time in your life when you could identify with Micah in his hymn of lament for his people (7:1-6)? How so? If you were to use this lament, (a) what would be your subject and (b) what images might you use instead of Micah's to express your feelings? How did Jesus use 7:6 (Mk 13:13; Lk 12:49-53)?
5. How well could 7:7-10 be construed as Micah's or God's people's appropriate reply to the critics' questions in 2:7 and 3:11b? What questions might it be a relevant reply to in your situation? How would you phrase those contemporary questions and the same reply in your own words?
6. In Micah's final message of hope (7:7-20), what has changed that makes hope both necessary and possible (7:7-9, 18-20)? How much depends (a) upon the people's response and (b) upon Yahweh's intervention? How central to this hope is Israel's great credo (Ex 34:6)? What are its basic elements? How are they expressed in the New Testament? To what extent are they the grounds for your Christian hope?



Remember to write up your answer to the comprehensive question from your notes.