

Explain the Messianic Hope.

6: The divided monarchy and prophetic ministry.

After Solomon Israel was split by rebellion in 931 BC and two nations were formed: Israel, or the Northern Kingdom (sometimes 'Ephraim' or 'Samaria') and Judah, or the Southern Kingdom (which also encompassed Simeon and part of Benjamin). [A rupture between the two had initially occurred after Saul's death and rivalries had continued.] Israel quickly fell into idolatry and not one king did what was right in God's eyes. In 721 BC it was defeated by Assyria and deported. Judah lasted longer, but also committed spiritual adultery. There were a few revivals under some good kings, such as Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, but her sin continued and she was defeated in 586 BC and exiled to Babylon. From there a few prophets ministered to the Jews, such as Daniel and Ezekiel, and God preserved the remnant of his people; even from potential genocide as described in Esther (the only book where God is not mentioned). After the prescribed 70 years of punishment, the remnant returned to Jerusalem in three waves. Ezra taught and exhorted the people to follow God while Nehemiah was allowed to rebuild the city walls and begin the restoration of the nation. Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people and exhorted them to rebuild the temple. After this the Bible is silent on the political history of Israel for 400 years (during the Greek / Roman Empires).

It was during this whole period that prophetic ministry flourished as at no other time. Such ministry always comes in to countermand failure in God's people, demanding a focus on the word of God and trust in his faithfulness. Some of the most important revelations about Christ's ministry and salvation are described in prophetic writings; indeed some are sublime, such as Isa 53. As revelation is progressive throughout the OT, it is logical that it is with the prophets that we see the life and work of the Messiah most clearly. Not only are there invaluable explanations of salvation, but there are many specific details foretold about the life of the Lord Jesus, which were fulfilled exactly. Jesus and the apostles quoted from the prophets repeatedly, such is their value. Some NT books only make sense by comparing them with OT prophetic works, such as the close relationship between Daniel, Zechariah and Revelation.

This period saw the faithfulness of God's mercy on a rebellious people and demonstrated Israel's propensity to sin, resulting in the final rejection by Jesus in Mat 21:43. Indeed, this was necessary in order to bring about the fulness of God's plan in the ultimate revelation of the church, baptised by the Spirit into Christ's body, the fulness of him who fills all in all. Israel's rejection was finally implemented in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the loss of the priestly line – i.e. the end of Biblical Judaism. Kings had failed, the nation failed; the time was set for the incarnation of the long-awaited Messiah.

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