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A DESIGN FOR A SEGMENT BASED ON THE METHODS
OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PREACHERS TO
BE INCLUDED IN A COURSE IN
HOMILETICS

by

Vilmar Emilio Gonzalez

ABSTRACT

A DESIGN FOR A SEGMENT BASED ON THE METHODS
OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PREACHERS TO
BE INCLUDED IN A COURSE IN
HOMILETICS

by

Vilmar E. Gonzalez

Adviser: Norman K. Miles

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Dissertation Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A DESIGN FOR A SEGMENT BASED ON THE METHODS
OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PREACHERS TO
BE INCLUDED IN A COURSE IN HOMILETICS

Name of researcher: Vilmar Emilio Gonzalez

Date completed: April 1990

This project attempts to discover some criteria (or characteristics) that can be used in contemporary preaching, based in the Old Testament. So I selected seven Old Testament preachers (prophets) and analyzed seven of their sermons (or messages) or parts thereof. Somehow they cover the history of Israel as a nation starting with Moses down to Haggai. The other five are; Joshua, Solomon, Elijah, Amos and Jeremiah.

Once I discovered the contents of their messages, I tried to relate them to contemporary preaching. I believe it is useful and contains helpful materials for the use of

ministers and preachers. Also, it is intended to be used as a segment of a course in Homiletics.

This study is divided in three main parts as follows:

Part I deals with a comparative analysis of the seven selected sermons to discover the homiletical characteristics that they might provide.

Part II suggests a segment of a Syllabus for a Course in Homiletics. It contains a brief discussion of the pedagogical methodology to be used, a Syllabus, one full lecture and two sermons.

Part III presents some conclusions and personal reflections on how this project helped me to improve my ministry in preaching.

One interesting feature in this study is that all seven sermons have the covenant between God and Israel, at Sinai, as background. It undergirds all the messages of the prophets.

I hope that this study will help preachers to become more familiar with Old Testament preaching, and thus not only them, but their listeners as well can benefit from their sermons.

NOTE

This Doctor of Ministry project report falls in a category described in the Seminary Bulletin as "Project II" in fulfillment of requirements for an alternate curriculum plan under which the candidate prepares two related papers-- a theological position paper addressing some issue or problem in the church theologically, and a professional paper addressing this issue or problem from the standpoint of ministerial practice.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A DESIGN FOR A SEGMENT BASED ON THE METHODS
OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PREACHERS TO
BE INCLUDED IN A COURSE IN
HOMILETICS

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Vilmar Emilio Gonzalez

April 1990

A DESIGN FOR A SEGMENT BASED ON THE METHODS
OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PREACHERS TO
BE INCLUDED IN A COURSE IN
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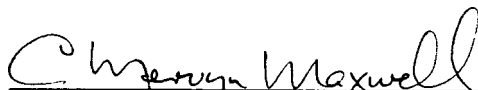
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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:


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Date approved

DEDICATION

To Lusía, my lovely wife, who for over twenty years has always supported and enhanced my ministry. To our dear son Edson, who has been a good son and very helpful in my ministry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

INTRODUCTION 1

 Justification of the Project 1

 Purpose of the Project 1

 Limitation of the Project 2

 Overview of the Project 4

 PART I: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SERMONS OF
 SEVEN SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Chapter

 I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERMONS 7

 A Study of Seven Old Testament Sermons to
 Discover Some Homiletical Characteristics 7

 An Analysis of These Sermons to Determine
 the Homiletical Criteria Which They Provide 55

 Major Common Characteristics 67

 Unique Characteristics 70

 II. APPLICABILITY OF THOSE CHARACTERISTICS TO
 CONTEMPORARY PREACHING 72

 PART II: A SEGMENT OF A SYLLABUS FOR A
 COURSE IN HOMILETICS

 III. DISCUSSION OF PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY 100

 IV. A SEGMENT OF A SYLLABUS FOR A COURSE
 IN HOMILETICS 102

 V. ONE FULL LECTURE 106

VI. TWO SERMONS114

 A. First Sermon: "The Best Choice"114

 B. Second Sermon: "God or Baal?"124

PART III: CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON HOW THIS
PROJECT HAS IMPROVED MY SKILLS IN THE
DELIVERY OF SERMONS AND IN THE TEACHING
OF HOMILETICS

APPENDIX137

BIBLIOGRAPHY141

VITA149

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To God

To my family

To some teachers for friendship and support - Advisory
committee

INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Project

The development of this project was motivated by the conviction that the Old Testament could provide, as God's word, a model for contemporary preaching. When one looks at books on preaching, one discovers that most of them explore mainly New Testament sermons (Jesus, Paul, Peter) as models for contemporary preaching, but there are some powerful sermons in the Old Testament; so it seems appropriate to consider whether their characteristics can fit into modern preaching to the benefit of today's churches. Personally, I like the Old Testament as much as the New, and I want to be more familiar with selected Old Testament sermons so I can preach from them.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to learn, through a study of the sermons of seven selected Old Testament preachers (prophets), some criteria (or characteristics) that could be applied to contemporary preaching. It was anticipated that this study would offer helpful materials for the use of ministers and preachers of the Seventh-day

Adventist Church in Brazil. Also it was intended to be used as a segment of a course in Homiletics.

Limitation of the Project

This project did not intend to be an exhaustive analysis of Old Testament preaching, or a deep exegetical study, but a segment only to be included in a course on Homiletics. Otherwise, it would have become too cumbersome.

Nevertheless, in order to have some insights on the subject and to learn how Old Testament sermons can enhance contemporary preaching, I selected seven Old Testament sermons preached throughout Old Testament times. These seven sermons were preached at some high and critical points in the history of Israel, by seven men as follows:

Moses - Mainly his fourth address just before entering the promised land, Deut 29, 30 (c. 1400 B.C.).

Joshua - Farewell speech and renewal of the covenant after the conquest and settlement in Canaan (some 25 years after crossing the Jordan River).

Solomon - Address at the dedication of the temple, a kind of confirmation of kingship in Israel (10th century B.C.).

Elijah - Speech at a time of near total apostasy in Israel (9th century B.C.).

Amos - A speech in times of great apostasy in Israel (8th century B.C.).

Jeremiah - His so-called "Temple Sermon" at a very critical time when God's people were being taken into captivity because of total apostasy (7th to 6th centuries B.C.).

Haggai - After the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity, at a time when materialism and disbelief had settled in and the people were very sluggish in obeying God concerning the rebuilding of the temple (late 6th century B.C.).

Homileticians have developed some criteria on which to more or less model contemporary preaching. It is not the scope of this paper to analyze all these criteria against the sermons discussed below. However, this study chooses some "characteristics" which are common among these Old Testament preachers. I want to learn if these sermons can help to establish a model for contemporary preaching. (This does not mean that other criteria could not apply.) Since I expect this study to offer some helpful materials for the use of ministers and ministerial students in Brazil, I made a survey as how Brazilians react to sermons that would have the characteristics discussed in this paper. The survey was done at random, given to pastors and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church spread all over Brazil, in order to have answers from a wide variety of people.

Overview of the Project

This study is divided in three main parts:

Part I deals with a comparative analysis of the seven selected sermons to discover the homiletical characteristics proposed for discussion in this paper.

These include:

Focus on one specific subject

Clarity and simplicity

Only two options

Positive and negative aspects clearly presented

Practical/adapted to life

Use of illustrations

Some dialogue (style)

Call for urgent decision

Call to action

Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect

This last aspect is singled out because I believe the Old Testament is as concerned with salvation as much as the New Testament; one can see such texts as Gen 3:15; Isa 53, 54:5, 63:16; Jer 31:3, 50:34; John 3:16; Rom 6:23; etc.

The reason for choosing the characteristics above is that they all are very common among the preachers chosen for the purpose of this study; also, they are advocated by modern homileticians.

Any of the books on Homiletics listed in the Bibliography deal with this subject.

An evaluation on the applicability of these characteristics for contemporary preaching follows the comparative analysis.

Part II suggests a segment of a syllabus for a course in Homiletics. It contains a brief discussion of the pedagogical methodology to be used, the preparing of the syllabus, one full lecture, and two sermons.

Part III presents some conclusions and reflections on how this project helped me to improve my ministry in preaching.

PART I

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ONE SERMON
BY EACH OF SEVEN SELECTED OLD
TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

CHAPTER I

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERMONS

The first part of this paper is an analysis of the seven chosen sermons. Perhaps not all of them were actual sermons, but they were "the word of the Lord" or messages from the Lord; nevertheless, they present some criteria which can be used in preaching today. For the purpose of this paper, the Old Testament passages studied are called sermons.

A Study of Seven Old Testament Sermons to Discover Some Homiletic Characteristics

Seven Old Testament sermons have been chosen; they are: (1) Moses' fourth address to Israel just before entering the promised land (Deut 29, 30); (2) Joshua's farewell speech (Josh 24); (3) Solomon's address at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:12-21, 55-61); (4) Elijah's speech at Carmel (1 Kgs 18:21-40); (5) Amos's sermon to apostate Israel (Amos 1:1-6:14; 8:4-9:15); (6) Jeremiah's "temple" sermon (Jer 7-10, 26:1-6); and (7) Haggai's sermons encouraging Israel to rebuild the temple (Hag 1, 2).

As soon as a preliminary study was begun, I discovered that all these sermons had the covenant made at Sinai as a background. Although the term covenant is not always clearly stated, one or more elements of it undergird the messages of these preachers.

In a preliminary form this covenant was made with Adam at the Fall (Gen 3:15), and later with Noah (ch. 9:12, 15, 16). But it was first with Abraham and his posterity that the covenant became fully effective (chs. 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:1-7; etc.). The covenant was ratified in a more formal way at Sinai, when Israel as a nation bound itself to comply with the divine requirements and accepted the promises (Exod 19:5-8; 24:3-8).¹

Ancient covenants were of two kinds, those between lord and vassal and those between equals.

Ancient covenants had several elements, but usually the following six elements were found in the Hittite treaty texts, and they are typical of the format of ancient coventants:

1. Preamble
2. The historical prologue
3. The stipulations
4. Provision for deposit in the temple and periodic public reading
5. The list of gods as witnesses

¹Francis D. Nichol, ed., Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC), 10 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 8:243.

6. The curses and blessings formula.¹

Throughout Scripture, the covenant type most commonly used is the former which describes the formal relationship between God and Israel. As in the covenants between lord and vassal, God determined the provisions for Israel (who could accept them or not), and thus the covenant was considered binding upon both God and His people.

Throughout Scripture, however, the term "covenant" most commonly describes the formal relationship that existed between God on the one hand and Israel as the chosen people on the other On His part, God promised to bless His people, to give them the land of Canaan for a possession, to make known His will to them, to send them the Messiah and to make them His chosen instrument for the conversion of the world. On their part, the people were to yield implicit obedience and to cooperate with all of God's requirements.²

The covenant between God and His people was a mutual agreement on conditions, privileges, and responsibilities. By studying these sermons (with the exception of Jonah's), one can quite easily discover that they contain the stipulations once agreed upon by God and Israel (Exod 19:5-8; 24:3-8, etc.), stipulations mentioned over and over again by the prophets. Basically the sermons were reviews of the stipulations of the covenant with appeals to Israel (who broke it over and over again) to abide by it for their

¹George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," The Biblical Archaeologist (New Haven, Connecticut: The American Schools of Oriental Research, September 1954), 50-76.

²Nichol, SDABC, 8:243.

happiness. When the prophets reviewed the good deeds of God on behalf of Israel, they expected the people to be moved to follow Him only. God's grace and love should be enough reason for Israel to be faithful.

**Sermon 1: Moses' Fourth Address to Israel
Just before Entering the Promised
Land (Deut 29, 30)**

The book of Deuteronomy is an oration based on the covenant; in it Moses appeals to Israel to live according to the covenant. Four sermons are recorded in this book: (1) "Moses' Announcement of Deposition" (1:6 to 4:43); (2) "A Review of the Law" (4:44 to 26:19); (3) "The Blessing and the Curse" (27:1 to 28:68); and (4) "The Covenant in Moab" (29:1 to 30:20).¹

The substance of the material presented here in summary form is a recollection of God's acts in history, from the Exodus, through the testing period in the wilderness, and up to the arrival of the people on the plains of Moab. To the reader, the repetition may seem somewhat tedious at first sight, but the significance of the repetition appears in v. 3: "the Lord has not granted you, up to this day, a mind to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear." With the perspective of time, the Israelites could learn to see God's presence in their past experience, but it required insight and perception. . . . Hence there is a continual return to the theme in the address of Moses, in order that the audience might be brought to real "understanding" of the ways of God, real "seeing" of the acts of God, the real "hearing" of the words of God. If the days ahead were to be successful, it was necessary to

¹Ibid., 1:954.

have this profound understanding which was so closely associated with faith in God.¹

Moses was a prophet, a priest, a great leader, and an administrator. In the fourth sermon he addresses all Israel (29:1) presenting to them very plainly their faithfulness to the covenant as a prerequisite to being established in Canaan. He reminds the Israelites of their past history and how loving and fair God had been with them. He exhorts the people to be faithful to the stipulations of the covenant, exhorts them to keep the law, explains the results in blessings and curses, appeals for an immediate response, etc.

Moses starts by reviewing God's dealings with Israel since they were in Egypt and up to that time (vss. 2-8); it is a typical way of confessing faith in the Lord. God had been very good to Israel (past history); His faithfulness in keeping His part of the covenant was the basic reason (vs. 9) for Israel to be faithful to Him, so they "could prosper in all" that they did. God's grace and love should motivate the Israelites to respond positively in obedience to Him.

In vss. 10-15, Moses summons everyone, starting with the leaders and proceeding down to the children and "sojourners" (vss. 10, 11), even those absent (future generations, vs. 15), to enter into the covenant with God.

¹R. K. Harrison, ed., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT), 13 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 2:356.

Two parties of a covenant relationship are mentioned: (a) the people (vss. 10-12) and (b) God (vss. 13-15). God wanted to continue to be in covenant with Israel.

In vss. 16-28, Moses reviews how Israel dwelt in Egypt and later when passing through the midst of different nations on their way to Canaan, focusing on the point that the Israelites were well aware of the worship of idols and all other gods pertaining to these nations (vss. 16, 17).

The purpose of this covenant renewal is evident from Israel's own experience of idolatry and abominations among the nations (vs. 16-17). Consequently, the nation must be on guard particularly against that member of the community who, having taken the vows, now feels that he is safe to do as he pleases (vs. 18-19).¹

Then he admonishes Israel to not follow and worship those idols and gods (vss. 18-21), lest they suffer the curses for breaking their allegiance to the God of their covenant.

Moses stresses in his address the interrelationship between the parts and the whole within the covenant community of God. It was the community as a whole which was bound to God in the covenant and which would receive God's blessing in the promised land. Yet the emphasis on the community did not mean that the individual was an anonymous non-entity. The health and vitality of the whole community depended on the health and vitality of the religious commitment of each individual within it.²

¹Nolan B. Harmon, ed., The Interpreter's Bible (IB) 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 2:505.

²Harrison, NICOT, 2:359.

As an illustration of how thoroughly Israel would be uprooted (in case of breaking the covenant), Moses mentions what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, Adma and Zeboim (vs. 23).

In vss. 22-28, Moses emphasizes his point by introducing a dialogue, where future generations and foreigners (vs. 22), even all nations (vs. 24) would ask, "Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What means the heat of this great anger?" (vs. 24). The answer would be given by men who would say, "It is because they forsook the covenant of the Lord" (vss. 25-28). Future generations and even visitors would remark in astonishment about the calamities that God would send upon the rebellious Israel.

The covenant was something very well known to Israel. God had revealed to them the terms of the covenant (vs. 29) and thus the people should give heed, obey, and be faithful to God.

"The secret things," i.e., the future, belong to God. In our limited knowledge we cannot know them. Yet sufficient has been revealed to us in the covenant that we may not live. We are to do what we should while it is day, for the night belongs to God.¹

Chapter 30:1-10 presents how the blessings could be restored. God in His mercy (Redeemer aspect) would bless His people again, though they broke the covenant, if they would only come back to Him. God's protection and guidance

¹Harmon, IB, 2:507.

since the deliverance from Egypt, and throughout Israel's wanderings in the wilderness up to then, were evidences of His unmerited grace and love (cf. Deut 7:7-9; 9:1-5). That should be enough reason to motivate Israel to be faithful (obedient) to the covenant. God would even take upon Himself the responsibility of helping Israel to keep its part of the covenant, in love and obedience (vs. 6). He would "circumcise" their hearts or "touch" them to make the Israelites His (circumcised) people (cf. Lev 26:41; Jer 31:33). "To circumcise the heart means to quicken one's spiritual perception and make tender one's conscience."¹

It would not be difficult for Israel to keep its part of the covenant because (besides having it in writing) they had it right then and there with them; it was not something that was faintly known to them due to distance, for example (vss. 11-14), so they could "do it" (vs. 14).

In vss. 15-20, Moses sums up his sermon mentioning the advantages (blessings, vs. 16), and disadvantages (curses, vss. 17, 18) of the covenant relationship. He makes a hearty call to Israel by proposing an "either/or" choice, "life and good, or death and evil" (vs. 15), appealing at the same time to Israel to choose "life" and the "blessings" of keeping its part in the covenant. Before presenting the stipulations of the covenant, Moses presented the grace of God as manifested in His care and love for His

¹Nichol, SDABC, 1:1060.

people since Egypt. Grace precedes (is greater, and only reason, motivation) obedience. The historical prologue reminds Israel of God's goodness. The redeemer aspect (grace) precedes obedience (the stipulations of a covenant). Blessings or curses are the consequences of acceptance or rejection of God's grace. It was an important matter requiring an urgent decision; four times the expression "today" appears (vss. 15, 16, 18, 19), and his appeal for the welfare of Israel is also fourfold: (a) "choose life"; (b) "love the Lord"; (c) "obey His voice"; and (d) "cleave to Him" (vss. 16, 19, 20). The appeal also includes a call to "heaven and earth" (vs. 19) as witnesses of the fair proposal to Israel to be faithful to the covenant relationship, so they could "dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them" (vs. 20).

**Sermon 2: Joshua's Farewell Address to Israel
on the Renewal of the Covenant
(Josh 24: 1-28)**

Covenant (Josh 24:1-28)

At Shechem, after Israel was partly settled in Canaan, Joshua reviewed the history of Israel, recounting the wonderful deeds of God on its behalf, so all the people could once more appreciate how much God loves them, thus continuing to serve Him with all their hearts. It is a moving sermon climaxed by Israel's renewal of its allegiance to the covenant.

They were at a solemn crisis. God had chosen them for His work. . . . To fail to do that work to which God calls is, by that failure, to nullify the choice. It was, then, a matter of life and death for Israel. How would they decide?'

In vss. 2-13, Joshua reviews Israel's past history since God's call to Abraham (vss. 2, 3); then he goes on to mention Isaac and Jacob and the time Jacob went down into Egypt and how God brought Israel out of Egypt (vss. 3-5). Joshua then reminds the people how God took care of them in the wilderness, how later on He destroyed the Amorites and other nations in order to settle Israel in Canaan, thus fulfilling His part of the covenant (vss. 5-13). Joshua gives several examples of God's loving care, even giving Israel a land with cities and "vineyards and oliveyards which" they had not worked for (vs. 13). It was God who had given them the victory. God's redemptive acts in the past should motivate Israel to obey Him, so Joshua appeals to Israel to do its part of the covenant (vs. 14) and to act promptly by throwing away all idols, etc. He presents before the people his personal decision (and of his family as well) to serve the Lord (vs. 15) as a challenge to Israel to do the same.

The covenant involves a free and moral act in which the people engage to put away all other gods and to serve the Lord alone. . . . By an act of mutual choice Israel had become the people of the Lord. They were bound therefore to keep the

¹James Hastings, ed., The Great Texts of the Bible, 20 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), 2:135.

covenant on pain of rejection. . . . The mighty acts of the Lord have been rehearsed; he has proved himself to be God.¹

There is a sense of urgency in Joshua's proposal, "choose today"; any delay in taking full commitment on the covenant could be disastrous (curses). Joshua's personal testimony was intended to move the people to act promptly, and in this it was successful, as the dialogue that followed between him and the people indicates (vss. 15-25). The people answered positively (vss. 16-18) deciding to serve the Lord. They recognized that it was indeed God and only God who had done marvelous things for them; and in recognition of His grace and love they declare their intention of serving Him alone. Joshua stresses (vss. 19, 20) that God would not accept them because He is holy and they are sinners, breakers of the covenant by worshipping other gods. Joshua remonstrates with them that the claims of the God of Israel are exclusive; a burst of enthusiasm is not enough. But the people again reinforce their decision (vs. 21).

Joshua warns the people that they are making a choice to which they must expect to be held accountable: "You are witnesses against yourselves" (vs. 22).

Before there could be any permanent reformation, the people must be led to feel their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God.

¹Harmon, IB, 2:669. (Compare the people's reaction to Peter's sermon in Acts 2:37-41.)

They had broken his law, it condemned them as transgressors, and it provided no way of escape. While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God's perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin, and receive strength to obey God's law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Savior, if they would be accepted of God.

The appeal is twofold: (a) "choose" (or decide right away, vss. 15, 22) and (b) "put away the foreign gods which are among you" (action, vs. 23). A decision to serve God is the first thing in keeping His covenant and being in good stand before Him.

The people were moved by Joshua's appeal and a ceremony of reconsecration (vss. 24, 26) highlighted Israel's decision; even a monument (vss. 27, 28) was erected to (a) commemorate the renewal of the covenant and (b) to remember the people of their decision.

**Sermon 3: Solomon's Address Based on the
Covenant at the Dedication of the
Temple (1 Kgs 8:14-21, 55-61)**

Solomon was of noble origin, a prince by birth. At his father's death he became the king of Israel. He carried on his father's desire to build a "house for God". When the

¹Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 524.

house was completed, Solomon made a speech to dedicate it as "a holy place" where people could meet to worship God.

Though Solomon's address perhaps is not a sermon (some people could loosely call it a sermon), it is included here because Solomon's words--including the prayer--have the covenant as background and also because they were spoken at a high point in the history of Israel as a nation--confirmation of kingship.

He started by addressing God (in poetry), focusing on His majesty (vs. 12), telling Him about the house he had built as "a place for thee to dwell forever" (vs. 13). "The original dedication of the temple by Solomon was in the form of an ancient song 'which the LXX says was taken from the Book of Jashar (upright)'."¹

Solomon, then, faced the congregation (vs. 14) and addressed it with a short discourse (vss. 15-21) which was followed by his prayer of dedication of the Temple (vss. 22-54) and concluded with a sermon pronouncing a blessing upon the people and appealing for their faithfulness and obedience to God. This discourse, though short, "is a solemn declaration (vss. 15-21) that the temple was undertaken and finished according to Jehovah's word and

¹Harmon, IB, 3:71.

will."¹ God had been good to Israel and the temple was evidence that the God of the covenant was with them.

Facing the congregation, Solomon starts by exalting the God of the covenant: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with His had has fulfilled what he promised with His mouth to David my father" (vs. 15).

In vss. 16-20, he presents some aspects of Israel's past history, starting with the time when Israel was in Egypt; in other words, first, the God of the covenant had redeemed them from Egypt and had also been with his father David; second, he, Solomon, was God's instrument to accomplish the task of building a house for the Lord. The redemptive acts of God were motives for obedience to God and faithfulness to the covenant.

David's old dream of building "a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel" (vs. 17) was now fulfilled through the kindness and will of God. God prevented David from building a house for Him (vss. 18, 19), but permitted his son Solomon to build it (vs. 19); now God's promise had been fulfilled (vs. 20).

A main reason to build the temple was to provide "a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord which he made with your fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt" (vs. 21).

¹John Peter Lange, ed., Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scripture, 24 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 6:98.

The tables of stone laid up in the ark were enduring witnesses of the covenant into which Jehovah had entered with His people. The erection and consecration of the Temple was another evidence of the faithfulness of God to His part of the covenant bringing Solomon great joy.¹

At this point Solomon offered a prayer of dedication and intercession (vss. 22-34), afterward, he blessed them and appealed to them to abide by the covenant. God had been with them all the way from the deliverance from Egypt to the present. Solomon acknowledges and praises God for fulfilling His past promises (covenant, vss. 55, 56) and asks God to continue with him and the people into the future (vss. 57-59). The reason why God was to keep His part of the covenant was to spread the knowledge of Him; (vs. 60), and thus all the earth should know about such a great God.

Solomon finished his sermon with an appeal to Israel to keep its part of the covenant. The reason was that God had been so good to them; His love and constant care had been seen since the days of the deliverance of bondage in Egypt. God's love should motivate the people to be faithful to Him. Solomon makes an appeal to Israel to respond to the love of God by being loyal to Him, "Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day" (vs. 61).

¹George Barlow, ed., The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary, 32 vols. (London; Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1892), 8:112.

Sermon 4: Elijah's Sermon: "Who is the True God, Jehovah or Baal?" A Call for Israel to be in Covenant with God or with Baal (1 Kgs 18:21-40).

There was almost complete apostasy in Israel. The people of God had broken the covenant and turned to "Baal and Asherah." The result was hardship for Israel, culminated by a terrible drought of three and a half years (for curses, fulfilling the covenant, see Deut 28:23, 24; Lev 26:19; 1 Kgs 16:30-33; 17:1). When King Ahab, the false prophets, and the people were gathered on Mt. Carmel at the appointed time, Elijah addressed them with a clear-cut question: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kgs 18:21).

We have in this story of Elijah the record of the actual struggle which went on in Israel for at least fifty years between monotheism and idolatry, between puritanism and immorality, between the individual conscience and a despotism, between nationalism and foreign influences. Politically, socially, morally, and religiously Elijah represented and concentrated this struggle.¹

The sermon contents reflect what was happening concerning to the covenant relationship. The drought (curse) was upon them because of disobedience (breaking of the covenant), and Baal (the god of nature and rain) had not been able to help (bless) Israel by sending rain upon the land.

¹James Hastings, The Great Texts of the Bible, 2:413.

Elijah did not use any preliminaries or introduction; he started addressing the problem directly, making a strong appeal at the very beginning. He challenged all in the audience to decide right away "who" is the true God, and then dared them to "follow him" (action).

The prophet went on to boldly claim to be the only true representative left of the Lord's prophets (vs. 22), whereas Baal's prophets numbered 450 men.

It was the battle field of two religions, and Elijah concentrated the struggle in the first words that fell from his lips, words marked as much by his stormy contempt as by his religious passion; words that carry their impassioned appeal to us: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him".¹

In order to settle once and for all "who" the true God was, Elijah challenged the people with a fair proposal: "Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; second, I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, he is God" (vss. 23, 24).

Sensing the fairness of the proposal the people agreed to it saying, "It is well spoken" (vs. 24).

The test that Elijah proposed was entirely fair. The issue at stake was, Who was God, Jehovah or Baal? If Baal was what the pagan priests claimed

¹Ibid., 2:415.

him to be, then let him demonstrate that fact by bringing forth fire from heaven. If he has, indeed, the power of the rain and the storm, let him send forth his lightning bolts. Even the priests of Baal could not deny the fairness of the offer made, though they must have feared the results.¹

The test. 1. This test was fair to the Baalites. They acknowledged Baal as the god of fire. If he could manifest his power in any way, surely he could in the way proposed. 2. It was honorable to Elijah. His appeal was to the special prerogative of Baal. He does not ask for a manifestation of power not claimed for him by his followers. 3. It was adapted to the multitude. It was one upon which they could all judge. It would appeal to their senses, involving no mystery, and leaving no room for doubt.²

Like Joshua, Elijah uses a kind of dialogue style in his sermon. He also calls for an urgent (immediate) decision: "Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it'" (vs. 25).

Now there is a break in the sermon, so the people can appreciate a living illustration of Elijah's challenge and proposal on how could they decide "who" was the true God. The false prophets made their offering (vs. 26) and pleaded with Baal to answer their call by sending fire, but nothing happened.

Elijah speaks again using ironic language against Baal and its prophets (vs. 27).

¹Nichol, SDABC, 2:819.

²Barlow, PHC, 8:292.

These priests of Baal needed to learn that their god could not answer their prayers. Elijah's words to them were expressions of supreme contempt. His scornful ridicule was not lost on the spectators, who were there to make their decision between Jehovah and Baal.'

Another break, and the people watch the useless devilish efforts of the false prophets to have Baal answer their prayers (vss. 28, 29). Elijah gives time to the people to consider and reflect about which God is worth "following" (covenant). Exhausted at last, the false prophets give up. Their crazy craftiness prove to be useless.

Elijah speaks again and calls the people to draw near to him (vs. 30a). He has full control of the situation. He speaks with authority because he represents well the true God; and all the people come near to him (vs. 30b).

There is another break in the sermon while Elijah takes "12 stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob" (vs. 31), and he "built an altar in the name of the Lord" (vs. 32). To make a deeper impression upon the people, Elijah dug a trench around the altar and ordered some people (participation of the audience) to fetch water and pour upon the altar and fill the trench (vss. 33, 34).

'Nichol, SDABC, 2:819.

Having all set, Elijah speaks again, introducing a prayer (like Solomon) in his sermon (vss. 36, 37). The prayer is in the context of the covenant. It is a request (according to the initial proposal, vs. 24) to the "Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (the God of the covenant) to answer by sending fire as evidence of (a) "Who is the true God," and (b) "God's mercy as being still available--" "and that thou hast turned their hearts back" (vs. 37, Redeemer aspect).

"Then the fire of the Lord, fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (vs. 38).

No sooner is the prayer of Elijah ended, than flames of fire, like brilliant flashes of lightning, descend from heaven upon the up-reared altar, consuming the sacrifice, licking up the water in the trench, and consuming even the stones of the altar. The brilliance of the blaze illumines the mountain and dazzles the eyes of the multitude.¹

Greater demonstration of "who" was the true God (vs. 39) could not be presented. Justice and mercy were portrayed there. Because of apostasy (break of the covenant), Israel deserved the fire of judgment. Instead the fire fell on their substitute, the sacrifice upon the altar. It was a beautiful representation of righteousness by faith. And in awe and fear, the dumbfounded people could

¹Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1937), 152, 153.

do nothing but cry out, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God" (vs. 39).

The people recognize God's justice and mercy in withholding the dew and the rain until they have been brought to confess His name. They are ready now to admit that the God of Elijah is above every idol.¹

Once the people confessed their acknowledgement about "Who" was the true God, Elijah made his final appeal for immediate action (eradication of the cause of evil; slaying of the false prophets, vs. 40); and the people responded accordingly and promptly, thus opening the way for spiritual reformation and renewal of the covenant relationship.

Elijah will not have the people's zeal waste itself in mere words. He requires that they show their conversion and conviction by deeds which might bring upon them the wrath of the unholy queen, but which, once committed, will make a break between them and the curse of Baal. As a result of the wonderful manifestations of that day the multitude had acknowledged the fact that Jehovah is God--all except the priests of Baal, who had refused to repent. Elijah's summary execution of these priests was fearful vengeance, but it was necessary and showed God's indignation against those who persist in rebellion, and who are willing to corrupt and demoralize an entire people for selfish ends. The sentence against them served both as an example and a warning.²

¹Ibid., 153.

²Nichol, SDABC, 2:820.

Sermon 5: Amos's Sermon rebuking the Northern Kingdom for the Breaking of the Covenant and urging them to come back to the Lord (Amos 2:6-6:14; 8:4-9:15).

Amos, a farmer or herdsman for cattle and sheep, a layman from the Southern kingdom, was commissioned by God to go to Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom and "prophesy to Israel" (7:14, 15). His ministry probably took place between 767 and 753 B.C.¹

The location of Amos' preaching was Bethel, where there had been a center of Baal worship since Jeroboam, who at the beginning of his reign, had set up a golden calf there (1 Kgs 12:26-33). At Solomon's death, in 931 B.C.,² ten of the tribes of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam's tough policies and elected Jeroboam (a former servant of Solomon, then in exile in Egypt) as their king (1 Kgs 12:1-20). Since then, the worship of the calf at Bethel was widely spread.

Israel (North) was openly breaking the covenant. Apostasy had spread all over, and they were about to be taken into captivity by the rising Assyrian nation. In order to prevent that, God in His mercy sent Amos (Hosea and others) to warn them about the peril they were facing.

For the purposes of this study, discussion here is limited to the "prophetic messages" for Israel (North), as

¹Ibid., 4:954.

²Ibid., 8:220.

outlined in the chiastic structure prepared by Dr. William Shea¹, of the book of Amos (Amos 2:6 to 6:14; 8:4 to 9:15). (See Figure 1.) In the first part of the book (1:1 to 2:5) Amos deals with messages to foreign nations and Judah. The judgments that God would send to them should warn Israel of what would happen to it also. And chapters 7:1 to 8:3 contain some visions and personal biographic data.

¹Personal interview with Dr. William Shea, May 24, 1988.

Chiastic Structure of the Book of Amos by
Dr. William Shea

Chapter	Chapter	Chapter	Chapter	Chapter	Chapter
1 -	4 a	5	6 a	7 b	9 b
Address to Foreign Nations Judah, Israel	Noble Women	Key Word: Justice Judgement	Noble Men	Biographical Temple Confrontation	Promise of Hope
Judgments (seven)	4 b Judgments (past)	Call to Repentance	Judgments (future)	8:1 4) God not turns 5) God not turns	Foreign Nations
1) Syria	1) People	5 a	Visions	9: 5, 6 Creator Hymn	Judah
2) Philistia	2) did not	1) Seek and live	1) God repents		Israel
3) Tyre	3) repent	5: 8, 9 Creator Hymn	2) God repents		
4) Edom	4) and		3) God not turns		
5) Moab	5) turn back				
6) Judah	4: 13	2) Seek good not evil			
7) Israel	Creator Hymn	Hate evil love good			
		3) Do Justice			

Figure 1. Chiastic Structure Chart.

SOURCE: Personal File

From an homiletical viewpoint, Amos very cleverly started his sermon by addressing the foreign nations (ch. 1), mentioning God's judgments on them because of their sins, and thus building up some rapport with his hearers to gain the full attention of Israel. Then he turns on them. There is an element of surprise in this. Were not the Israelites supposed to have all the blessings from God (for they were the people of the covenant), while the curses were to fall upon the wicked nations around? But now Amos told

them that the same judgments against the heathen nations would fall upon Israel because of its sins.

Amos's message is based also on the covenant between God and Israel, starting back at the time when God brought Israel out of Egypt (past history, 2:10; 3:1); and the election of Israel to be His only people, all other nations being excluded, comp. Deut 7:1-8; 9:4-6.

The sermon starts with an explanation of why God would punish Israel, that is, because of their sins (break in the covenant, 2:6-16).

Chapter 3 focuses on the greatness of God and His desire to save Israel (Redeemer aspect) before it would be too late. The people had broken the covenant (vss. 9, 10), so God would not protect them to prevent destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. God's judgments would come upon Israel as much as upon the other (foreign) nations.

In vss. 3-6, Amos uses a figure of speech known as a "metaphor" (or illustration). In fact, he uses seven altogether, stating different causes and their corresponding effects as warnings to Israel of what was about to come to pass (the causes being already there); and without cause (or reason), there would be no effect, that is, what God was about to bring (destruction for breaking the covenant) was already known (causes, vs. 7, 8). These metaphors are in the form "of incisive rhetorical questions, employing vivid

figures of speech drawn from both the country and the city."¹

In His mercy (Redeemer aspect), God would do nothing without first warning the people through His prophets.

But he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. They are in strict correspondence with him, and he shows them things to come. Such secrets of God are revealed to them, that they may avoid evil, and, by walking closely with God, secure the continuance of his favour.²

However, the warning had already been given (God had sent His "servants the prophets"); and the covenant stipulations were clear also. At this point, God had already "roared" (vs. 4), so something great (destruction) would surely come (as sure as a cause-effect relationship). Therefore, the Assyrians would come and destroy Israel (effect, vss. 9-15) because of their break of the covenant (cause--sins, vs. 1--these are listed in detail in the following chapters).

In chap. 4, the prophet focuses on the "curses" (according to the covenant, Deut 28), which would come because of sin (4:1-5); here Amos addresses the noble women who were as great sinners as men (vs. 1, comp. 6:1). ". . . the Hebrew verbs and pronouns in vs. 1-3 suggest that Amos is rebuking the luxury-loving lives of the leading men and

¹Harmon, IB, 6:795.

²Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary, 6 vols. (New York-Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 4:677.

women of the capital of Israel."¹ And in vs. 2 "God pledges by His own holiness to avenge Israel's unholiness. God's very nature cannot tolerate iniquity forever."² In fact, many curses had already come (vss. 6-11), but to no avail. Past judgments did not do any good, because the people did not turn back to God. Therefore, God would punish them further to the point of wiping them out (vs. 11); and one can see that Israel's sins were terrible by the comparison with what had happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 112) and the resulting punishment.

Verse 12 is a moving appeal to Israel: "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

The prophet's message in effect was, "Make ready to meet the coming judgements of the Lord." Those who would heed the call and repent would be forgiven and would be assured of God's protection in the day of the dreaded punishment. The LXX reads, "prepare to call on thy God, O Israel." God never bids men to prepare to meet Him without making a provision of mercy for those who do so prepare.

. . . God warns Israel that He is about to haul the nation into court, as it were. They will do well to prepare their case, if they have one.³

The judgments (curses) that God had sent so far did not aim at destroying Israel, they were warnings to arouse Israel into faithfulness to the covenant with Him, and the

¹Nichol, SDABC, 4:966.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 4:968.

blessings therein. And now, before a final blow, God gives another opportunity (Redeemer aspect), though the people who break the covenant--as Israel used to do over and over again--did not deserve it. The expression "prepare to meet your God" has a twofold meaning: (1) opportunity to make a case before God (if they could) and (2) opportunity to make provision (repentance) to avert doom. God would, if it were, bring Israel to court, like the kings in ancient times when they would move a lawsuit against their subjects for breaking the covenant existing among them.

Verse 13 is a beautiful "Creator Hymn" where Amos stresses the omniscience and power of God, for only He is the "Creator" and "Lord of hosts", the one who has everything under His control (comp. 5:8, 9; 9:5, 6).

Chapter 5 is the heart of Amos's sermon where he appeals to Israel to mend its ways, by seeking the Lord (Redeemer aspect). He starts the appeal with a "lamentation," kind of contrast between the sovereignty of God (Creator Hymn) and the fate of Israel because of their sins.

In vs. 1-3 Amos laments the fall of Israel. After pronouncing woes upon the rebellious Israelites, the prophet changes his tone to that of a mournful spectator looking upon fulfilled judgements. In this he reflected the spirit of Christ, who is so gracious that He not only shows us our sins but sorrows when He must punish us for them (see Luke 19:40-44).¹

¹Ibid., 4:969.

On the one hand, Amos points out the sins straightforward and boldly, but on the other hand, he pleads with the people, over and over again, that they turn back to the Lord and be faithful to the covenant (a call to action). The following expressions emphasize the willingness of God in continuing to bless His people (Redeemer aspect): "Seek me and live" (vs. 4); "do not seek Bethel and do not enter into Gilgal" (vs. 5); "seek the Lord and live" (vs. 6); "seek good not evil" (vs. 14); "hate evil, and love good" (vs. 15). Israel was to seek the Lord, the Creator, as exalted again in vss. 8, 9 (second "Creator Hymn").

In chap. 6 Amos begins by condemning the noble men (vs. 1), "those who lie upon beds of ivory" (vs. 4), that is, the leadership of apostate Israel. He presents a "woe" to those putting off the day of the Lord and states that judgment will come because of sin and transgression. He gives some illustrations to stress his message. For instance, in vs. 12 he asks, "Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen?" It is not natural; nobody would run with horses over rocks or plow among rocks; however, the people were doing unnatural and incongruous things like turning "justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood." Therefore, punishment and destruction would be the consequence. Amos makes generous use of illustrations throughout his sermon (3:36, 12: 4:10, 11; 5:3, 19, 24; 6:2, 12).

Though appeals are made throughout the sermon, they are mainly at the center of it (chap. 5, chiastic structure, Fig. 1). However, after some more condemnation of sin and warnings (8:4 - 9:10), Amos ends his sermon with promises of hope, restoration, and blessing (9:11-15), thus showing again the merciful and loving character of God (Redeemer aspect). Verse 11 says that "in that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages. . . ." Though Israel deserved some punishment (and complete rejection by God because of breaking the covenant), Amos gives it hope with glorious promises of future restoration.

**Sermon 6: Jeremiah's Sermon Rebuking Judah
Southern Kingdom) for Breaking the
Covenant and Urging Them to Return to
the Lord (Jer 7-10, 26:1-6)**

Jeremiah was a priest and prophet of the Lord (c. 600 B.C.). He was emotional and timid. It must have been very hard for him to be the "mouthpiece" of God to Judah-- especially as he pointed out their sins (breaking of covenant) and declared the consequent results in destruction and captivity. About a century earlier, God had sent Amos to "prophesy" to the Northern Kingdom for breaking the covenant. Now God commissioned Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the temple in Jerusalem and "proclaim" the "word of the Lord" (7:1) to all who came in there "to worship the Lord."

It has been suggested that this sermon was given on the occasion of a national festival, when the Temple was crowded with worshipers.

To worship. The prophet implies that since the people had come to worship God, they should listen to the word that God had for them.¹

The so-called "Temple Sermon" is within the "chiastic" framework of Jeremiah's book and a part of the whole message that God gave him to tell the people. In order to avoid much discussion involving all the book of Jeremiah, I chose the "Temple Sermon" as a sample because I wanted to have some insights for preaching from Jeremiah (and in this paper I cannot discuss the whole book). The part/portion chosen is a part of the "Divine Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem" (2:1-25:38).

The book of Jeremiah can be divided as follows:

Prophetic commission - 1:1-19.
 Condemnation of Judah - 2:1-25:38.
 Conflicts of Jeremiah - 26:1-29:32.
 Future restoration of Jerusalem - 30:1-33:26.
 Present fall of Jerusalem - 34:1-45:5.
 Condemnation of nine nations - 46:1-51:64.
 Historic conclusion - 52:1-34:32.

The message of the book is given in the context of the covenant between God and His people (cf. 7:23). And because Judah had broken it (sin), Jeremiah rebuked and warned the people of the consequences thereof. The heart of Jeremiah's message is in chap. 31, where God promises to restore both houses (Israel and Judah) under a new covenant (Redeemer aspect, cf. vss. 31-34).

¹Nichol, SDABC, 4:386.

The people in Judah at this point were in as bad a condition regarding the covenant as were those in the Northern Kingdom a century before. Chapter 26:1-6 provides some insights on the background for the "Temple Sermon." Judah knew very well what had happened (curses) there, nevertheless, the people did not learn the lesson, and now, before their turn came (curses), God sent Jeremiah as a last effort to awaken them and, thus, through repentance, to avoid destruction.

The sermon deals with the problem of false worship and judgment. Judah had broken its covenant with Yahweh and was worshipping (in covenant) other pagan gods (7:16 ff.).

Jeremiah starts his sermon with an appeal (7:2-7) for the people of Judah to mend their ways and make the most of God's willingness to forgive (Redeemer aspect); by doing so, the covenant relationship would continue and God would grant them to continue "to dwell" in the land (vs. 7).

The sermon is at heart a call for a radical change of lifestyle; 'Amend your ways and your doings' (v. 3). And it spells this out in a series of "ifs" (v. 5-6). The kind of lifestyle God expects from his people means unquestioning loyalty to the one God, a loyalty which will find practical expression in a caring society. Only if that call is heeded can the people lay claim--as they are only too anxious to do--to the promises of God: "then I will let you swell in this place" (v. 3, 7) or perhaps better, with some versions of the text, "then I will dwell with you in this place".¹

¹Robert Davidson, Jeremiah (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 72, 73.

In the first part of the sermon (7:1-8:3) there are five separate sections,

(i) the Temple Sermon (7:1-15); (ii) an attack on the worship of the Queen of Heaven (vv. 16-20); (iii) an oracle condemning the attitude that regarded the offering of sacrifice as a substitute for obedience (vv. 21-28); (iv) an oracle condemning child sacrifice and other evil practices in the Hinnom Valley (vv. 29-34); (v) a condemnation of the worship of astral gods (8:1-3).¹

At the very beginning Jeremiah makes an appeal, "Amend your ways" (vs. 3).

Jeremiah's message that day was simple and direct. "Reform your way of life and your actions" (lit. "make good your ways and your doings"). The whole direction of the worshipper's lives and the deeds that flowed from their wrong outlook needed to be transformed, amended, reformed.²

Jeremiah goes on telling the people not to take for granted that nothing evil would happen (vs. 4), though they had the Temple and in spite of their many sins which are specifically pointed out.

The popular idea that Yahweh was in some way bound to Zion was therefore wrong. His presence in the temple was an act of pure grace. The temple was, no doubt, a means by which God could show his grace among his people; but the temple in itself was of no value if God no longer manifested his grace among the people. As a concomitant to such thinking it is implicit that the temple was not essential to the fellowship between the man of Israel and his God.³

¹R. K. Harrison, ed., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament NICOT, 8 vols., Jeremiah by J. A. Thompson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 272, 273.

²Ibid., 275, 276.

³Ibid., 276.

The people rejected time after time when God called on them over and over again (vss. 13, 14). Now God would destroy even "the house which is called by my name" (vs. 14, compare God's answer to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chr 7:20--covenant context); as an example, Jeremiah points out what had happened to Shiloh many centuries back (1 Sam 4:12-22).

Verses. 16-20 mention God's order to the prophet not to intercede on behalf of Judah because their sins and worship of other gods (break of covenant); and the bad consequences (curses) of this situation would fall upon the people, not upon God (vs. 19).

In vss. 21-26, the prophet said that God was not as much interested in sacrifices as in obedience (to the covenant). And as a way of reviewing their stubbornness and rebellion as being an old problem, the prophet reminded them what their forefathers had done (since Egypt); they despised the prophets God had sent them and were even worse (vs. 26).

Alongside the temple practices was the deep-rooted worship of the Queen of Heaven which demonstrated a fundamental insincerity in the nation (vv. 16-20) and was a symptom of the people's refusal to accept the sovereignty system had become meaningless to Yahweh (vv. 21-28). It was never his intention that either the temple or the sacrifice should become an empty form.¹

The following verses (7:27-8:3) are a message of doom because of Judah's sin. Wickedness and rebellion were

¹Ibid., 287.

of such a nature and so cherished by the people that they simply did not want to turn back. It was a hopeless situation. The worship of idols and the sacrifice of children formed part of the idolatrous worship of the pagan nations around. This horrid practice was taken over by Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kgs 13:3; 21:6). This kind of sacrifices, the psalmist declared, were offered "unto devils" (Ps 106:37, 38). Jer 8:47 contain four illustrations from real life to illustrate the nature of such idolatrous worship and the rebellion of the people to mend their ways: (1) "men who fall" (at least they try to get up again, vs. 4); (2) "if one turns away" (eventually they will come back, vs. 4); (3) "like a horse plunging headlong into battle" (everyone followed his own ways, vs. 6); (4) "birds know their time of migrations" (whereas the people did not know "the ordinances of the Lord", vs. 7). "The prophet draws a sharp contrast between the fidelity of the birds to their migratory instincts and the unfaithfulness of man to the laws that govern his being." God's concern for His people was useless.

In vss. 8-12, Jeremiah addresses mainly the leaders (priests, prophets) condemning their soothing words to calm the people's fears about their fate while compromising with sin. "It was they who boasted of the knowledge and

Nichol, SDABC, 4:393.

possession of the law in spite of their heedlessness to the divine requirements."¹

As a result God would destroy them all the same. They were all like barren trees (vs. 13), thus ready to be pulled out.

The spiritual leaders, the prophets, and the priests dealt in "fraud" (seger), and had nothing to offer a broken people but empty assurances that all was well when the nation was sick. And were they ashamed that they acted thus? Not at all, for they neither felt shame nor knew how to blush. It was the end. The question had been answered. Could men reach a stage of apostasy where they would never repent? Yes they could, and Judah had reached that point. Now they would fall among the fallen and go down on the day of Yahweh visitation.²

In vss. 14-17, there is an ironic invitation to go into fortified cities to perish. Jeremiah puts himself in the place of those about to go into captivity (kind of dialogue style), and he utters the words they would say and relates what they would do, even though it would be useless any attempt to avoid their doom. Although there was deliverance from serpents in the time of Moses, now there would be none (vs. 17). To make his point stronger and to express the personal anguish on the fate of the people, Jeremiah utters a lamentation for Judah (8:18:9:11). In 8:20, Jeremiah expresses what the anguished cry of the people would be. Thompson suggests that perhaps it was

¹Ibid.

²Thompson, Jeremiah, 300, 301.

". . . a popular proverb used in daily life when men encountered a hopeless situation from which no deliverance or escape seemed possible. Jeremiah pictured the people of Judah as having passed by one opportunity after another to repent of their rebellious ways and so be delivered or saved (Eb. nosa) from coming judgment).¹

Rebellion and stubbornness had so widely spread out that though "balm" and "physicians" were available (vs. 22), the people did not want to be cured (abide by the covenant).

The people's lack of healing was not due to the absence of means to effect a cure, but to the refusal of the nation to come to the Great Physician. Perhaps the people had become insensible to their needs. Perhaps they were too proud to accept the remedy, and thought they could cure themselves. Perhaps they had grown to love the disease. At any rate they would not look to the Healer and live.²

It seems that Jeremiah's lamentation has a threefold aspect: (1) Sorrow for the people's stubbornness to turn back to the Lord; (2) sorrow for what would happen to them; and (3) sorrow for the gross wickedness of God's people (vss. 2b-11, sins already pointed out).

The hopeless misery of God's people touched Jeremiah, and however deeply he may have entered into the impending agony of Judah's suffering (8:18-23), he was faithful to tell Judah about their impending doom. He wept bitterly because of Judah's helpless situation.

¹Ibid., 306.

²Nichol, SDABC, 4:394.

Verses 12-16 reports a simulated dialogue between Jeremiah and God, about Judah's breaking of the covenant and its consequences.

To Jeremiah's pressing question, "Why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through?" (vs. 12), God's answer given, is "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, . . . (vs. 13). The reference to the covenant is clear. Back in the time of Moses, Israel accepted Yahweh's covenant and acknowledged His sovereignty (Exod 19:4-8). Obedience was very much in focus (19:5). To this demand, Jeremiah returned again and again (cf. Jer 7:23-26). Thus the prophet links the destruction of Judah now with disobedience to God's law (covenant).

Verses 17-22 provide another lamentation; this time Jeremiah invites the women to mourn over the fate of Judah, that is, in the same way hired women would do when mourning over the dead.

In the Middle East even today, on the occasion of deaths or calamities, mourning is carried out by professional women who follow the funeral bier uttering a high-pitched shriek.¹

Jeremiah pictures the catastrophe to the nation as having take place, and suggests that the usual honors paid to the dead be carried out.²

¹Thompson, Jeremiah, 316.

²Nichol, SDABC, 4:398.

In vss. 23, 24, Jeremiah contrasts the false reasons Judah had for boasting (wisdom, power, riches) against the true reason one could have for "boasting," that is, "to know and obey the Lord" (covenant), the only reason for one to "boast," that is, to be happy was to have all goodness from God as portrayed in the covenant. The prophet states here the true nature of wisdom and knowledge which the wise men, the warriors, and the rich people of Judah had forgotten in the midst of concentrating on their own activities and achievements. The knowledge of God is the only true reason for "boasting" (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17).

Man is to serve God with all the mind (Matt 22:37). But knowing God goes beyond a merely theoretical understanding. It is an experimental knowledge. It is practical. It manifests itself in walking in God's ways (see Job 22:21; Jer 22:16).¹

In this brief statement therefore we have a succinct summary of the religion of Israel at its highest. Wisdom, strength, and riches, however valuable they may be when properly used, are altogether subordinate to the knowledge of God. True religion consists in acknowledging the complete sovereignty of God in life and allowing him to fill life with those qualities of steadfast faithfulness, justice, and righteousness which he possesses, in which he delights, and which he desires to find in his people.²

In vss. 25, 26, Jeremiah equals Judah's sinful ways as to the pagan nations round about; circumcised (covenant) or not, they were all alike, and therefore would all be punished in the same way by God. The total picture here is

¹Ibid., 4:398.

²Thompson, Jeremiah, 321.

that Judah was no better than the pagan nations around it. Hence Judah could expect to be punished.

Chapter 10:1-16 portrays the foolishness of worshipping "lifeless," "powerless" idols. Instead, the people should be in covenant with the true God, the only One who can actually do good to them.

Theologically, these verses are very important because they set Yahweh apart from every other god or object of worship. "There is none like thee, O Lord" (vs. 6); "the Lord is the true" and "living God" (vs. 10); the creator of "the earth" and "the heavens" (vs. 12); the controller of the "rain" and "wind" (vs. 13); the one who alone is worthy of the "fear" (reverence) of all men (vs. 7). Moreover God claims Israel as His own (vs. 16).

As Lord of the covenant Yahweh demanded total unswerving loyalty from his subjects. Any attempt to share allegiance to him with another merited judgment, for it amounted to a rejection of the covenant. In that case the curses of the covenant became operative.¹

Verses 17-22 present as certain the invasion of Judah and the captivity of its inhabitants. After the digression in the beginning of this chapter (vss. 1-16), dealing with the folly of idolatry, the prophet returns to the subject of chap. 9, namely, the impending exile. He pictures the departure of the people in a dramatic way. He

¹Ibid., 326.

even (ironically) admonishes the people to "gather up" a few articles and to prepare for immediate departure into exile.

Then Jeremiah finishes his sermon with a prayer (vss. 23-25), pleading with God for mercy even when sending His judgments against His people. It is an intercessory prayer in which Jeremiah speaks as Judah's representative. It is a confession of sin and a plea for moderation in punishment. The theology of this prayer is that, if God punished pagan nations around because they did not "know" Yahweh, He would do the same to His own people who also did not "know" Him (through personal knowledge, commitment).

That Israel also should need to be punished in the way prescribed for the Gentiles was the tragic result of centuries of unrestrained apostasy and the rejection of Yahweh's covenant and its demands. It was simply not true that Yahweh would overlook sin and rebellion in his own people, however much they reasoned that they lay beyond divine judgement simply because he once chose them to be his people. Jeremiah offered the people a theology for disaster before it struck. The weight of his words was not fully appreciated till many years after his death.¹

Sermon 7: Haggai's sermons encouraging the rebuilding of the temple (after the Babylonian captivity, (Hag 1, 2).

Haggai preached his sermons around 520 B.C.,² that is, roughly 15 years after the decree of Cyrus ordering the rebuilding of the temple when many Jews returned from the exile (cf. Ezra 1, 2).

¹Ibid., 338, 339.

²Nichol, SDABC, 4:1076.

Haggai talks to Zorobabel (who represented the civil power--king-ship), to Joshua, the high priest, and to the people (Hag 1:1, 12, 13; 2:2, 4). He preached four short speeches, but they all have only one theme centered on the rebuilding of the temple--the restoration of which would be a token of the full restoration of the covenant relationship with its corresponding blessings. (Presently Israel was under curses; cf. Deut 28).

The problem that prompted the prophet's message was that those who had returned from Babylon were neglecting the job of "rebuilding the house of the Lord" (1:2). It is true that there was much opposition (Ezra 4) but had they not got word from God, through Cyrus, to rebuild the temple? (Ezra 1:1-4).¹ They were disobeying God's word and thus bringing upon themselves all kinds of hardships and suffering (curses). While facing all kinds of difficulties, they were more interested in building "paneled houses" for themselves while the "house of the Lord lay in ruins" (vs. 4).

The content of Haggai's message has the covenant as background and the temple with its services was a kind of visible token of the relationship between God and Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 8:25-53). In 2:4, 5, God assured Israel that He was still willing to abide by the covenant made at Sinai. In vs. 17, God said that He sent the calamities that His people were suffering. He wanted to arise His people and

¹Nichol, SDABC, 3:325.

bring them back (cf. Lev 26:14-46; Deut 28:15-67), but they did not return (Hag 2:17). In spite of this, God still wanted to do His part and bless His people again (cf. Hag 1:8, 13, 14; 2:4-9, 18, 19, 21-23).

Haggai sermons can be outlined as follows:

- I. First Message, 1:1-5--6th month 1st day, 2nd year of Darius (520/519 B.C.).
- II. Second Message, 2:1-9--7th month, 21st day, 2nd year of Darius (520/519 B.C.).
- III. Third Message, 2:10-19--9th month, 24th day, 2nd year of Darius (520/519 B.C.).
- IV. Fourth Message, 2:20-23--9th month, 24th day, 2nd year of Darius (520/519 B.C.).¹

Chapter 1:2:15--Haggai starts his preaching stating the attitude of the people who were despising the word of the Lord about rebuilding temple (cf. Ezra 1:1-4), by excusing themselves that the time for it "had not yet come" (Hag 1:2). He presses on, accusing the people for dwelling in their "paneled houses" (vs. 4). For that, the people had found time and means--to reconstruct their homes--but what about the temple? Before proceeding further, the prophet makes a twofold appeal right at the beginning of his address:

(a) Vs. 5, "Consider how you have fared." This appeal is repeated in vs. 7. Haggai goes on explaining what was happening (1:6, 9-11; 2:16, 17, 19).

¹Nichol, SDABC, 4:1076-1080 (dates can be checked).

The hardships Israel was facing--shortage of food, drought, etc.--were not simply due to natural causes, but to the God who controls nature (1:11); to Him whose "house" the people had neglected. God was helping them and caused Cyrus to grant them permission to return. He also issued a decree ordering the rebuilding of the temple (cf. Isa 44:28; 45:1; Ezra 1:1-4). By despising and neglecting this opportunity and by going after their own material interests, Israel was again putting aside the covenant relationship, and therefore subjecting themselves to the curses therein (cf. Deut 28). And through Haggai, God appeals to Israel to "consider how they had fared".

(b) Vs. 8, "Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the Lord." Here there is an appeal for action and it is very specific. God would "take pleasure in it." He was displeased that the people were building only for themselves, but He would be pleased when the people built His "house"; that should be enough reason to raise the people to action. And God would be "glorified." He would be "served and worshipped in the temple when it is built, and sanctified in those that come nigh to him."

¹Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 4:1392.

Vss. 12-15--Haggai's message was so convincing that the people responded accordingly.

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared before the Lord. . . . and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God. (Hag 1:12, 14).

The first fruit of the command of the hearing was, that the people feared before Jehovah; the second is mentioned in v. 14, namely, that they resumed the neglected building of the temple. Their fearing before Jehovah presupposes that they saw their sin against God, and discerned in the drought a judgment from God.

This penitential state of mind on the part of the people and their rulers was met by the Lord with the promise of His assistance, in order to elevate this disposition into determination and deed.¹

"Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, 'I am with you, says the Lord'" (Hag 1:13).

The people "worked on the house of the Lord of hosts their God" (vs. 14), starting as soon as they could gather some materials, on the twenty-fourth of the sixth month (520 B.C.,² vs. 15), that is, some twenty-three days after Haggai's powerful sermon, and they worked hard until they

¹Keil and Delitzch, Commentaries on the Old Testament, 27 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 27:183.

²Nichol, SDABC, 4:1077.

had finished it some four years later (515 B.C., cf. Ezra 6:14, 15).¹

2:1-9--In the second year of Darius the king, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and say, 'Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not. 'For thus says the Lord of hosts; Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, so that the desire of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts'.

These words were spoken about a month after the work had restarted (520 B.C., see above). There is no rebuke in them, only words of encouragement and promises of greater splendor connected with the temple. At the climax of it all, "the desire of all nations" would come (vs. 7).

Some older people in the audience who had seen the beauty and majesty of Solomon's temple, now felt very sorry (cf. Ezra 3:12). Haggai's question, "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?" suggests that the temple before captivity was far superior in all aspects. So

¹Ibid., 3:360.

much so that the present, rebuilt temple was "as nothing in their sight" (vs. 3). However, the prophet assures them that this temple will far supersede the first one. And he enumerates a series of encouraging wonderful statements and promises of God:

(a) "I am with you" (vs. 4).

(b) "My Spirit abides among you; fear not" (vs. 5).

(c) "I will shake the heavens, . . ." (vss. 6, 7).

This reference probably is an allusion to the natural phenomena that accompanied God's manifestations at Sinai (Exod 20:18; 21:18-21), and it would happen again.

(d) "The desire of all nations shall come" (vs. 7).¹

The coming of the Messiah was the climax of all expectations of the Jewish nation.

(e) "I will fill this house with glory" (vs. 7, cf. 1 Kgs 8:10, 11; 2 Chr 7:1-3).

(f) "I will give you peace" (vs. 9).

In order to assure His people that He is able to fulfill these promises, God stated, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine" (vs. 8). Everything, even the precious things of this earth, belong to God, and as such, He can use them at His will; so likewise God has the ability to fulfill His promises.

¹Some translations have "the treasure" or "the desirable things" instead of "desire" of all nations, but that is not very accurate either from the context or from a grammatical point. (See SDABC, 4:1079).

Vss. 10-19--Here again Haggai uses an object lesson concerning the "holy flesh" of animal sacrifices. He dialogues with his hearers. One of the duties of the priests was to teach the people God's requirements; so Haggai addresses two questions to them, and because of their position, their answer should be considered authoritative:

(a) "If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touches with his skirt bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy?" (vs. 12).

(b) "If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" (vs. 13).

Then Haggai concluded: This is exactly what is happening right now:

The prophet here gives the interpretation of vs. 11-13. Not only the exiles themselves, but also everything to which they put their hands brought the divine curse instead of the divine blessing. Their disobedience in not building the Lord's house was their pollution. This message is definitely a reproof for the previous action of the people.¹

Nevertheless, Haggai continued, God is willing to reverse the bad situation of His people (vss. 15-19). They should now "consider what will come to pass from this day onward" (vss. 15, 18), and they could count on it, for God said, "From this day on I will bless you" (vs. 19). Haggai

¹Nichol, SDABC, 4:1080.

forecast abundance of harvest and all other good things, when the people returned to God (cf. Deut 28:2-14).

Vss. 20-23--Haggai's message concluded with a promise of restoration. Zerubbabel here, as governor of Judah (2:2), represented the continuation of the house of David. God would send His judgments (vs. 21) against whoever tried to oppose His purposes. God Himself would take care of His people, as represented by Zerubbabel. God would make him "like a signet ring" (vs. 23), or a seal, which was regarded as an object of great value, importance, and authority.

As in the beginning of His message, Haggai concluded his last address, stressing that all of his words were but the word of the "Lord of hosts." What a blessed assurance then, to have such promises spoken by the Commander of the heavenly armies. They will certainly be fulfilled.

An Analysis of These Sermons to Determine the Homiletical Criteria Which They Provide

As stated above, the sermons have as background the covenant relationship between God and Israel. The sermons were powerful and moving messages urging God's people to be faithful to the Lord and/or turn to Him when they broke the covenant.

These sermons provide us with some homiletical characteristics, and the analysis below attempts to demonstrate this.

Moses Sermon (Deut 29, 30,
Reminding Israel to be
faithful to the covenant)

Moses addresses a specific subject: Israel's attitude toward the covenant (which they once accepted) would determine their prosperity (blessings, good and life), or their destruction (curses, evil and death).

The issue at stake was faithfulness to God or to other gods. Moses presents very plainly and clearly all the implications and results of keeping or not the covenant.

There are illustrations to enlighten Moses' statements (29:23; 30:11-14). Also a very important "either/or" proposal, "life" or "death"; there is no middle way when it comes to commitment (30:15-20). The sermon contains a call to action; four verbs stress Moses' appeal, (1) "choose," (2) "love," (3) "obey," and (4) "cleave" (30:16, 19, 20). It calls for an urgent decision; the expression "today" appears four times (vss. 15, 16, 18, 19).

Moses introduces a dialogue to call attention to the importance of his sermon (29:24-28). And the redeemer aspect is there in expressions like: (God) "will have compassion," "will gather you again," "choose life," "love God," etc. (30:1-10, 16, 19). God's concern, love, and mercy are emphasized as enough reason for Israel to be faithful to Him.

This sermon contains the homiletical characteristics proposed in this study as one can see in the summary below:

1. It addresses a specific subject: Faithfulness of Israel to the covenant.

2. It addresses an important and decisive matter-- "life or death"--(clarity and objectivity).

3. Positive and negative aspects are clearly presented.

4. It contains illustrations.

5. There is a very plain proposal--only two choices--(not multiple alternatives).

6. There is a call to action (practical aspect).

7. A dialogue is introduced in the sermon at one point.

8. It is a matter of urgent decision (today).

9. Emphasis on the redeemer aspect (past history in this case) gives reason to keep the covenant).

Joshua's Sermon (Josh 24)
(Renewal of the covenant)

Joshua addresses a specific subject: Faithfulness and renewal of the covenant (at a time when some breaking of it was already in progress) as a pre-requisite to being established in Canaan. It is presented as an important and decisive matter with blessings or curses; it is a matter of continuing to be or not being God's people (vss. 19, 20).

The issue at stake was that Israel already was breaking the covenant by worshipping the gods of the surrounding pagan peoples (specific problem is mentioned).

Joshua uses illustrations from past history (vss. 2-13) to make his point about the goodness of God in keeping His part in the covenant as reason for Israel to keep its part. It is of practical nature.

Like Moses, Joshua presents a proposal (vs. 15) which is followed by a dialogue (vss. 16-27) that came out naturally as the people were moved by Joshua's personal testimony (vs. 15) and appeal for Israel to serve the Lord; in his appeal there is a call for action ("choose," "put away," vss. 15, 23); it calls for an urgent decision (choose this day).

The redeemer aspect is presented in the historic prologue (vss. 2-13, about half of the sermon) where Joshua recounts the marvelous way God helped His people, starting with Abraham down to the settlement in Canaan; how many times God had kept them from harm and evil, and delivered Israel from the hands of their enemies; etc.

Joshua's sermon also can provide the following characteristics as applied to homiletics:

1. It addresses a specific subject: Renewal of the covenant (at a time when some breaking of it was already in progress).
2. It has important and decisive elements-- blessings or curses.
3. Its positive and negative aspects are clearly presented.

4. It contains illustrations.
5. It offers a very plain proposal, only two choices (no multiple alternatives).
6. It contains a call to action (practical aspect).
7. It is presented as a matter for urgent decision (this day).
8. It produces a spontaneous dialogue.
9. It contains the speaker's personal testimony.
10. It emphasizes God's goodness as Redeemer as the primary reason for obeying Him.

Solomon's Sermon (1 Kgs 8:12-21, 55-61). (Dedication of the Temple as "keeping place" for the covenant)

Solomon's sermon is quite short, but it was augmented by the lengthy intercessory prayer which accompanied it. The specific subject is the dedication of the Temple, so it would be a "keeping place" for the covenant (ark with the Ten Commandments) between God and Israel; and as such the Temple would be a kind of token of the covenant relationship. It includes praise and thanksgiving to God for His past mercies (historic prologue).

The message is very clear, namely, about the goodness of God in providing a temple according to His promises to David. The construction of the temple was a living illustration of God's concern for His people, as well

as God's dealings with David and Solomon. The people were confronted with only two options based on the positive aspects of the covenant relationship. In other words, Solomon emphasizes how God had been faithful on His side, and he appeals to the people to do their part, thus encouraging them to choose the right path and avoid the negative results (implied, if they did not follow the Lord).

The sermon contains an appeal for action (vs. 61), and the decision that is expected, though not stated as being urgent, is nonetheless very important (blessing would come as a result of obedience only). God had been good to Israel and the building of the temple was evidence (vss. 15-21) of the grace and loving care of God for His people; the redeemer aspect is also emphasized in vss. 56-59; God's care in the past was a guarantee for His care into the future, an excellent reason for Israel to continue to be faithful to Him.

There is no proposal in the sermon. And the homiletical characteristics can be outlined as follows:

1. It addresses a specific subject: Dedication of the temple and confirmation of the covenant.
2. The address is clear and simple.
3. It implies only two options.
4. It contains illustrations.
5. It presents positive and negative aspects clearly.

6. It focuses on practical aspects of life.
7. It offers a call for action (practical aspect).
8. Greatly emphasizes God as Redeemer.

Elijah's Sermon (1 Kgs 18:21-40)
(A call for Israel to decide once
for all about whom they want to serve)

Elijah challenges Israel to decide once for all their choice between the two gods they were presently pretending to serve. The specific subject is "to serve the Lord" (covenant) or "Baal." Elijah's personal testimony was that he alone was still serving the Lord. It aimed at reenforcing the prophet's arguments.

The message is an important and decisive matter. Elijah's main point was to convince Israel to get out of their "limping" opinion between serving the Lord and Baal; while professing to be God's people (covenant), they were actually serving (in covenant with) Baal.

The sermon starts with a confrontation (no introduction or preliminaries) followed by a very fair proposal, with only two options, and the people promptly accepted it. At the same time it required an urgent answer (implicit, "choose right now about the bulls"). The development of the sermon is in a dialogue style, with "alive" illustrations focusing on positive and/or negative aspects; there is also a prayer in the sermon.

Though the sermon is not long (in words, but actually the whole presentation took about a full day),

Elijah condemns boldly the folly of serving Baal in a very clear manner; actually the fairness of his proposal and the developments of the day demonstrated in very practical ways the content of the message he wanted to convey to the people. He even addressed the false prophets with contemptuous words.

The redeemer aspect is portrayed in the prayer of Elijah, "that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God and that thou hast turned their hearts back" (vs. 37); the sacrifice itself pointed to the Redeemer to come. Elijah's sermon was convincing and moving, and when he made the call for action (vs. 40), the people acted promptly.

This sermon can also provide the homiletical characteristics which are being discussed in this paper.

1. It addresses a specific problem: Indecision (limping, compromising) about serving God and Baal.

2. The message is very clear and simple. It is an important matter (let's decide right away who is the true God).

3. It offers a proposal with only two choices.

4. It has a call to test right away Elijah's proposal.

5. It presents positive and negative aspects very clearly (the two sacrifices provided the elements--practical aspects).

6. It contains illustrations (alive).

7. It contains a personal testimony to stress how far the apostasy had gone.
8. It is presented in a kind of dialogue style.
9. It is a matter of urgent decision.
10. It has a call for action.
11. It emphasizes the redeemer aspect.

Amos' Sermon (Amos 2:6-6:14; 8:4-9:15) (A rebuke to the Northern Kingdom of Israel for breaking the covenant, urging them to come back to the Lord)

Amos' sermon is based on the covenant and focuses on the various implications of abiding by it or not.

The sermon addresses a specific subject: Breaking of the covenant with its consequent results (curses, practical aspect, chap. 4), which were already happening.

Amos deals very clearly with the positive and negative aspects of the issue which call for repentance and turning back (4:4-6, 14, 15, etc.). The sins are pointed out specifically (practical aspect). And it is also a matter of urgent decision (4:12). The redeemer aspect is focused in passages like 4:4-6, 14, 15; 5:4-15; 9:11-15.

To make his point, the prophet makes abundant use of illustrations. The main appeal is made in the middle of the sermon (chap 5), and there are some promises of hope and restoration at the end of chap. 9.

This sermon provides the following homiletical characteristics:

1. It addresses a specific subject: Break of the covenant and an appeal to return back.
2. It is an important and decisive matter (blessings and curses) which are presented very clearly and objectively.
3. Positive and negative aspects clearly presented.
4. It is a matter of life and death (only two alternatives).
5. Sins are specifically pointed out along with what to do (practical aspect).
6. It contains illustrations.
7. It is a matter of urgent decision.
8. There is a call to action (practical aspect).
9. It focusses on practical aspects of life.
10. Emphasis is on the redeemer aspect.

Jeremiah's Sermon (Jer 7-10; 26:1-6) (A rebuke to Judah for breaking the covenant, urging them to come back to the Lord)

Jeremiah addresses a specific subject: Breaking of the covenant and an appeal to Judah to come back to the Lord, who is willing to forgive (redeemer aspect, 7:3-7); there is an appeal at the very beginning of his sermon.

The prophet uses many illustrations (8:4-7) to make his message better understood, and he presents them very clearly and to the point. He also includes a "lament" in his address. And the positive and negative aspects

(blessings, sins) are pointed out specifically (practical aspect).

There is also an element of urgency throughout the sermon, since God will bring further (complete) destruction (curses) if people persist in breaking the covenant, so it is an important and decisive matter as well.

Some dialogue is introduced in the sermon to stress the prophet's point concerning what would happen to Israel because of their break of the covenant (8:12-22; 9:12-16). At the end of the sermon, there is also a short prayer.

Jeremiah's sermon can provide the following homiletical characteristics:

1. It addresses a specific subject: Breaking of the covenant with consequent results.
2. Positive and negative aspects are clearly presented (only two alternatives).
3. It is an important and decisive matter.
4. It is a matter of urgent decision.
5. It contains illustrations.
6. It includes some dialogue.
7. It has a call for action.
8. Emphasis is on the redeemer aspect.

Haggai's Sermons (Haggai 1, 2)
(Encouragement to rebuild the
temple with promises of restoration)

Haggai addresses a specific subject: Rebuilding of the temple. He builds up his message around this subject.

He rebukes the people for not building the temple, encourages them and appeals to them to rebuild it, and presents some promises of restoration when they do build it. The main promise was that "the desire of all nations" would eventually come and fill this temple with the "glory" of His very presence.

The prophet speaks very clearly and to the point. The people were suffering all kinds of misfortunes (curses), and the reason was their disobedience to God concerning the building of the temple. Haggai encourages them with well-stated promises.

Though not stated, there are only two options left for the people to wrestle with: they could continue as they were (disobeying) and suffer its consequences (curses), or they could obey God by rebuilding the temple. If they turned to Him, He would bless them (1:8; 2:19).

The negative aspects, hardships faced by the people, are pointed out very clearly. God was willing to reverse this situation and bless His people again (positive aspect).

Haggai is very practical also. He enumerates the hardships faced by the people, lack of food and money, severe drought, failed crops, "temple in ruins," etc. He uses all these different aspects of real life as illustrations to reveal the bad shape the people were in. A vivid illustration is the one mentioned in 1:6 where the prophet compares the hard financial situation to someone who

earns wages but does not profit anything. He said, "He who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes."

Haggai also makes a call for action (1:8), specifically to build the temple; he is very specific about what he wanted the people to do. This had to be done immediately, for the people were suffering too much already; they would not be able to endure it much longer. So there is a sense of urgency in Haggai's message (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18).

Of all the preachers and sermons discussed above, Haggai seems to be the one who emphasized most God's love and acceptance, or the redeemer aspect. This temple would be greater than the former because "the desire of all nations" would eventually come as evidence of God's pleasure and favor to His people (cf. 1:8, 13, 14; 2:4-9, 19, 21-23).

Major Common Characteristics

The major homiletical characteristics that came out of the study of the sermons analyzed above, and in accordance to the ones proposed at the beginning for the purpose of this paper, are the following:

1. **Address of one specific subject.** Direct or indirectly all these preachers talked about faithfulness to the covenant.

2. **Clarity and simplicity.** The matter presented is very clear and to the point. All the sermons deal with faithfulness to the covenant and obedience to God; all call

for urgent decision and action. Nobody has any excuse for arguing that he/she did not understand because the sermons were dubious or unclear.

3. **Only two options.** All the sermons leave no more than two alternatives: (a) Faithfulness and obedience to God which equal blessings and life; on (b) unfaithfulness (sins) and disobedience to God which equal curses and death.

4. **Positive and negative aspects presented very clearly.** The problems, sins, blessings, and curses and all that has to do with human life and the responsibilities before God and the Lord of the covenant are pointed out very clearly.

5. **Practical nature.** The prophets talked about the very core of human existence, mentioning the most common practical aspects of life and happiness.

6. **Use of illustrations.** All of the preachers make abundant use of illustrations, taking them from known historical events, nature, every day life, etc.

7. **Usage of dialogue style.** Of the seven preachers, four used some dialogue in their sermons. Joshua and Elijah had the whole sermon in dialogue format; and Moses and Jeremiah introduced some dialogue during the sermon to stress their points.

8. **Call for urgent decision.** In every case, the preachers called urgently for decision--to the point of mentioning specifically (some of them) a set time. Joshua,

for instance, said "Choose today"; Elijah proposes Israel to take two bulls and decide "right away." It seems that urgency of response was due to the importance of the situation; it was a matter of life or death, and the people (in sin) had to decide once and for all and act promptly.

9. **Call to action.** Besides making a prompt decision, the people had to act accordingly and immediately; so the preachers pointed out clearly and practically what had to be done. Haggai, for instance, told the people to "go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house."

10. **Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect.** All the preachers either emphasized or implied the Redeemer aspect at some point in their sermons. Grace and mercy were still available and destruction could be averted by turning back to the Lord.

As for the distribution of the material presented in the sermons, there is no set pattern following our modern methods of commonly dividing a sermon--in three (or more) major sections, usually one following the other and blended together in a sort of "crescendo" toward the "resolution," conclusion, and appeal. For example, Moses, Joshua, Solomon, Amos, Jeremiah, and Haggai made their appeals to action throughout the sermon, whereas Elijah had the appeal at the very beginning and at the very end. Solomon's sermon had a prayer in the middle of it, while Elijah offered a

prayer toward the end, and Jeremiah had his at the very end of his sermon.

However, there is a sort of pattern among those preachers; there is the contrast throughout the sermon--the positive (faithfulness, obedience, life) and negative (sins, curses, death) aspects--and at the same time an appeal to the listeners to follow the positive aspects and be in good standing before God who wanted to bless His children on earth.

The structure of the sermons followed the pattern of the covenant and, in the case of Amos and Jeremiah, the chiastic format was used. In any case, the sermons dealt with only two aspects of true religion: one either follows God and lives (blessings) or does not follow Him ultimately dies (curses).

All sermons analyzed above contain the characteristics proposed in this study.

Unique Characteristics

Since all the sermons were based in the covenant, all the preachers presented their sermons using the covenant "format," or part of it; and therefore, they have about the same features. (See Figure 1.)

Although this paper does not deal with some other homiletical aspects or styles I do want to point out that there are at least two preachers who present something unique in their sermons--Solomon and Amos.

Solomon - In the beginning of his sermon, he has some words of praise to the Lord for His past fulfilled promises (1 Kgs 8:15, ff.).

Amos - He included two "Creator" hymns as a part of his sermon (4:13; 5:8, 9; 9:5, 6).

Characteristics of the Sermon:	Moses	Joshua	Solomon	Elijah	Amos	Jeremiah	Haggai
Focus on one specific subject	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Clarity and simplicity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Only two options offered	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Positive and negative aspects clearly presented	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Adapted to practical life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Use of Illustrations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Some dialogue style	X	X		X		X	X
Call for urgent decision	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Call to action	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Fig. 2. Illustrative Comparative Chart.

CHAPTER II

APPLICABILITY OF THOSE CHARACTERISTICS TO CONTEMPORARY PREACHING

If one studies contemporary books on homiletics, one finds that some of the sermon characteristics seen in the seven Old Testament sermons presented here are in wide use today; others are not as widely used as perhaps they should be. Nevertheless, given the universality of God's way of communicating His word through human preachers, they could be used.

The prophets of old were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20, 21) to present the "word of the Lord" which came to them through visions and dreams (Num 12:6) or direct speech "in his ear" (1 Sam 9:15). In any case their word was the "word of the Lord," and the prophets frequently began their messages (sermons) with the words: "Thus says the Lord" (e. g., Amos 1:8; 3:11; Ezek 5:11).

In order for preachers today to deliver sermons that are also "the word of the Lord," it is essential that they study the "Word" very carefully.

Preachers today must do their best to transmit the "Word of the Lord," as spoken by the prophets, with all

possible integrity. Homileticians today favor this position and call it "Expository Preaching."

Professor Hadden W. Robinson, in his book Biblical Preaching, argues appropriately in favor of "expository" preaching as being the best way to communicate the "word of the Lord" nowadays. He says:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.¹

As the prophets should be faithful in expressing (exposing) God's will in human, understandable words, so the preacher today, in order to be true to the Word, should always bend his thought to Scripture and present it to his hearers, for it "is the power of God for salvation."

Fidelity to the text, exploration of its meaning at the time it was written, and its relevance for today should always serve as guidelines for contemporary preaching. Some very good principles of biblical interpretation are very helpful. Professor William D. Thompson, for instance, in his book Preaching Biblically, presents valuable material concerning sermon preparation and delivery. His suggestions are summarized as follows:

¹Haddon W. Robinson, Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 20.

1. **Simplicity.** The starting point for biblical interpretation is the clear, plain meaning of the passage.

2. **Intentionality.** God intends the Bible to communicate his creative and redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ.

3. **Correspondence.** The basic interpretative process involves correspondence between the biblical and the contemporary worlds.

4. **Polarity.** In every biblical passage, opposing forces are moving against each other.

5. **Contextuality.** Knowledge of a biblical passage's context or contexts may enhance its meaning significantly.

6. **Genre.** The literary form of the text profoundly influences its interpretation.

7. **Language.** Knowledge of the role and use of language facilitates the discernment of meaning.

8. **Identification.** Meaning is shaped by the placement of one's self and one's hearers in the dynamics of the text.

9. **Multiplicity.** A text may yield a variety of meanings.

10. **Perspective.** The Bible is a witness to the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ, the meaning of whose

life, death, and resurrection controls the meaning of every passage.¹

The sermon characteristics that came out in this study match the ones advocated by modern homileticians, supporting our assumption that they can be applied today.

There are at least four reasons why these characteristics should be applied in contemporary preaching.

1. They are biblical. In theology we assume that God's truth is found in the Bible, which in turn is the "revelation" of God and how He deals with the problem of sin. As such we say that theology is based on

- a. "Sola Scriptura" principle.
- b. "Tota Scpritura" principle (The whole Scripture is God's word).
- c. Universality of God's word.

If we take the three above principles as theologically correct and interrelated, we can say that the characteristics of the Old Testament sermons may be appropriately applied today.

2. They are always updated because of the consistency of audiences and the universality of God's word. What it is meant here is that the word of God has been preached to audiences with similar spiritual needs. The problem of sin/salvation is an ongoing process. This is to

¹William D. Thompson, Preaching Biblically (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1981), 45-77.

say, the word of God has always been presented to sinners in an attempt to make them aware of their situation so as to turn them around and help them to amend their ways. Since the audiences are exactly the same (are all sinners), but with the difference that each generation tends to be worse than the previous one (2 Tim 3:13), the word of God can be presented in the same basic manner today as it was in the past.

All human beings are in the same predicament--sinners (Gen 2:16, 17; Ezek 18:4, 20; Rom 3:23, 6:23a, etc.)--and, therefore, are in need of external help in order to be in good standing before God (Gen 3:15; Jer 31:3; Isa 53; John 3:16; Gal 3:26-28; Rom 6:23b, etc.).

The sermons of the Old Testament preachers (as well as of the New Testament, Peter [Acts 3:19]; Paul [Acts 17:22-31]) appeal for a return to the Lord. Contemporary preaching must do the same; for this reason the essential characteristics of Old Testament sermons are still very appropriate today.

By universality is meant that the word of God is applicable to anyone, anywhere, at anytime throughout the history of the world.

3. They are many, and were used by preachers successfully. Many homileticians and preachers use

successfully the characteristics that came out in this research.¹

4. A survey shows that they still are desired by the people in Brazil. The survey conducted in conjunction with this study demonstrates that people in Brazil would like to hear sermons with these characteristics and believe such sermons would help them to grow spiritually. As stated above, this survey was given at random to pastors and members, young and older, of the Seventh-day Adventist church all over Brazil.² The survey had basically one question, "How much would a sermon with these characteristics help you to grow spiritually?" (In addition, the pastors were asked their opinion on how much they thought a sermon with these characteristics would help the members of the church in their spiritual growth. The results of the survey are presented in tables 1 and 2.

Summary of Survey

Tables 1 and 2 record the responses to the study conducted in Brazil. Table 1 considers the responses from the church pastors, and table 2 records these from church members.

¹References are given when discussing the characteristics one by one.

²See Appendix for a copy of the survey.

TABLE 1

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM PASTORS

Sermon Characteristics	Contribution to Spiritual Life									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Focus on specific subject						1	3	7	6	5
Clarity and simplicity						1		6	3	12
Only two options offered			1	1	3			9	2	9
Positive and negative aspects clearly presented			3	1	1	6	3	3	1	3
Adapted to practical life	1		1		5	4	1	2	5	6
Use of illustrations			2		2	2	6	1	3	7
Call for urgent decision			1			1	4	3	6	6
Call to action				2	1		3		8	10
Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect								3	3	17

*The scale considers 1 as no contribution and 10 as much contribution.

TABLE 2

SURVEY RESPONSES FROM MEMBERS

Sermon Characteristics	Contribution to Spiritual Life									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Focus on specific aspect			1		3	2	1	11	13	32
Clarity and simplicity							4	4	6	46
Only two options offered	1			1		2	8	4	14	33
Positive and negative aspects clearly presented					2	2	6	12	13	30
Adapted to practical life	1			2	6	2		5	16	34
Use of illustrations			2	1	1	6	6	12	16	20
Call for urgent decision	2	1	1	2	3	5	8	9	11	24
Call to action	1	1		1	4	6	6	11	9	22
Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect						1	2	8	10	37

*The scale considers 1 as no contribution and 10 as much contribution.

Overall, about 66 percent of the pastors and 83 percent of the members who responded favored the sermon characteristics under consideration, evaluating them at the 8, 9, and 10 levels. They considered sermons with these characteristics uplifting to their spiritual growth.

It is interesting, however, to notice some differences between the pastors and the members. The pastors did not consider the "positive and negative" aspect very important, whereas the members wanted sermons to be very clear on this point. And though the "practical" aspect did not seem very important to the pastors, it was very important to the members; they wanted the sermon to address their practical experiences in life. Pastors should consider these differences carefully if they want to meet the felt needs of the people who apparently want to know exactly what they are supposed to do and how.

On the other hand, the survey reveals that the members who responded were not so interested in making an "urgent decision" as the pastors thought they should be. People throughout time have been the same as far as hearing and obeying the word of the Lord are concerned (cf. Isa 30:1-13). It is good for preachers to follow the order God gave to Jeremiah (Jer 1:17-19) to preach the word of the Lord, even under persecution, but always out of love (cf. Isa 1:18, 19).

For the sake of organization, the Old Testament sermon characteristics considered above are now analyzed in the order in which they appear on p. 79, and their applicability to contemporary preaching is examined.

1. Focus on one specific subject. The Old Testament sermons analyzed in chapter 1 covered a period of about 900 years, from Moses (c. 1400 B.C.) to Haggai (c. 500 B.C.). Each sermon was based on the covenant relationship between God and Israel, and the issue was always faithfulness versus unfaithfulness to it, with consequent results.

The message of each sermon had to do with the problem of sin and salvation, which could only be resolved through Israel's faithfulness to the covenant, where the Redeemer aspect was always present to help the Israelites be happy and prosperous both as individuals and as a nation.

Modern books on homiletics urge preachers to confine themselves to one subject or theme at a time; for instance:

Homileticians join their voices to insist that a sermon, like any good speech, embodies a single, all-encompassing concept To ignore the principle that a central, unifying idea must be at the heart of an effective sermon is to push aside what students of preaching have to tell us.¹

The general subject for the Old Testament preachers was about the covenant. Nevertheless, in each case, some specific aspect was the focus.

¹H. Robinson, 34, 35.

It is well known that good preaching from the New Testament is "Christocentric," that is, it is based in Christ and on the covenant relationship between Him and the believer, through faith. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have a common ground for preaching, that is, to help people to be in good standing with God and be saved.

We find in the New Testament that Jesus, Steven, Peter, and Paul dealt with one specific subject at a time. For instance, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), the subject was God's law as applied to the new kingdom and as an enlargement on the ten commandments. Again, Peter's sermon before the Sanhedrin (Acts 3), occasioned by the healing of the lame man at the temple gate, was a message that Peter was not preaching a new God but was connecting Jesus, in whose name the miracle occurred, with the God of Israel. Thus, Peter spoke very clearly on one specific subject and this was Jesus as the Messiah according to Scripture.

In the Old Testament, the sermons of the prophets are called "the burden of the Lord." . . . Each embodied a single theme directed toward a particular audience in order to elicit a specific response.

In the New Testament . . . the sermons of the apostles were without exception the proclamation of a single idea directed toward a particular audience.'

'Ibid., 35, 36.

It is good to address one subject or theme at a time for at least two reasons:

a. Clarity. People know the preacher is talking specifically about a subject or theme, and, therefore, they can understand better and easier what he tries to communicate.

b. Avoidance of confusion. This item complements the previous reason. If a preacher talks about many different subjects, people get mixed up and do not know at the end what the preacher was talking about or what he wanted them to understand and do.

An attempt is made here to designate the subjects of the Old Testament sermons considered above:

- Moses - "Faithfulness of Israel to the covenant."
Joshua - "Faithfulness and renewal of the covenant."
Solomon - "The temple as a place to house the ark of the covenant."
Elijah - "Choice between serving the Lord or Baal" (Covenant).
Amos - "Breaking the covenant with consequent results."
Jeremiah - "Breaking the covenant: rebuke and appeal."
Haggai - "Rebuilding of the temple."

Contemporary homileticians recommend that a preacher stick to one subject at a time. Note the following quotation:

One of the first lessons the preacher should learn is the importance of concentrating upon one theme in his sermon The preacher should have only one theme in his sermon and concentrate all his argument, proof, testimony, illustration, and so on, toward the enforcing of that theme.¹

2. Clarity and simplicity. The characteristics of clarity and simplicity stand out very forcibly in the Old Testament sermons. No one can deny, for example, the clarity of Elijah's sermon about "limping between serving the Lord or Baal." To make their messages clear, the Old Testament preachers would recall history well known to their audiences; they would use illustrations from real life and words with which the people were familiar. The preachers themselves knew well the messages they were to preach.

According to Thomas B. Liske, to "be clear is the first law of good explaining."² A congregation wants to know clearly and objectively what the preacher wants to say and what he expects them to do.

Clarity can be obtained by (a) precision in wording sentences, (b) using words or terms known and understood by

¹William Evans, How to Prepare Sermons (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 61.

²Thomas V. Liske, Effective Preaching (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), 169.

the audiences, (c) avoiding abstract expressions, and (d) presenting one subject at a time.

Another way to be clear in a sermon is through simplicity. Simplicity in the usage of simple words and sentences, avoiding technical terms and sophisticated language unknown to the hearers. How can people in the pew accept and follow what the preacher has in mind when they cannot understand the language he uses?

The Old Testament sermons provide this model for modern preaching. Joshua's sermon, for instance, brought immediate response from the people. They understood clearly what Joshua told them. The same happened with Elijah and Haggai. And though Amos' or Jeremiah's sermons did not get an immediate and positive response, because of hardness of people's hearts, nevertheless, we can still see that their messages were very plain, objective, and clear.

3. Only two options. The Old Testament preachers made very clear that there were only two alternatives to choose from. And they invited (insisted, pleaded with) the people to choose to be on God's side for their own good. The preachers in the New Testament also used this approach in their preaching; through illustrations from common things in life they pointed out that there are only two alternatives as far as life and death are concerned. For instance,

Jesus: The narrow gate vs. the wide gate (Matt 7:13, 14).

The house built on the rock vs. the one built on the sand (Matt 7:24-27).

Non condemnation for those who believe in Him verses condemnation for those who do not believe in Him (John 3:18).

Peter: Repentance for salvation is rejection of it and perdition (Acts 3:19-23).

In the sermons analyzed in this paper, we find the following expressions which demonstrate the fact that concerning the matter of salvation verses perdition there are only two options:

(Moses, Solomon)	blessings	verses	curses
(Moses, Jeremiah)	life	verses	death
(Moses)	good	verses	evil
(Joshua)	serving the Lord	verses	serving other gods
(Elijah)	God	verses	Baal
(Amos)	abundance	verses	lack of everything
(Amos, Jeremiah)	stay in the land	verses	captivity
(Amos, Jeremiah)	obedience	verses	disobedience.

The fashion today in scientific, philosophical, and even theological matters is to explore as many alternatives or explanations as possible to explain a given subject or

theory; at other times, there is a sort of compromising truth with error. But, when it comes to the ultimate problem of sin and salvation, there are no multiple choices. Throughout Scripture, it is always a matter of faithfulness and life or unfaithfulness and death. A sermon, to be biblical, should always address the very essence of the issue, presenting the only two alternatives which are consistently taught in Scripture.

4. Positive and negative aspects clearly presented.

Just as the Old Testament sermons offer only two alternatives, they also present the consequences of being on each side. They distinguish the consequences clearly so everybody can understand and decide wisely on which side to stand.

Today also, a sermon should address both positive and negative aspects of what happens in real life, here and in the life (or death) to come, concerning the problem of sin and salvation. "The popular sins and indulgences of our day should be condemned and practical godliness enforced."

Milton Crum, in his Manual on Preaching and when discussing the contents of sermons, also says preachers should present both the consequences of sin and the hope of

'Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 4:396.

redemption, which he calls "the unhappy resulting consequences of sin" and "the gospel content".¹

One of the reasons for the little interest in religion today is the thousands of options (religious groups, denominations, philosophies, sects) to choose from (and usually each one claims to be the right one), so people get confused and mixed up. The result is a general disregard or even contempt for the Bible and religion.

A sermon should confront a person with the reality of human existence, presenting theologically as well as pragmatically the positive aspects of a life lived in close relationship with God over against the disadvantages (moral, social, physical, spiritual) of living far from God and the plans He has for us here and hereafter.

5. Practical aspects of life. People in the pew want to know why things are so, what they are supposed to do, and how they are supposed to do them. It is the task of the preacher to present sermons focusing on the practical needs of people to help them cope with the problems (sorrows, joys, etc.) they will face the following week. They should present practical truth concerning the realities of the life to come as the ultimate scope of and hope for this life.

¹Milton Crum, Manual on Preaching (Pasadena, California: Judson Press, 1977), 20.

People in the world today are perishing for lack of hope and meaning for life. The word of God deals practically with matters of life and death as far as the problem of sin and salvation are concerned. A sermon which does not address the basics of real life and the needs of the people is useless; "the living preacher must proclaim the words of life and salvation."¹ "Never should he [minister] preach a sermon that does not help his hearers to see more plainly what they must do to be saved."²

The Old Testament preachers considered in this study addressed very practically the situations and needs of real life. Moses and Joshua urged Israel to abide by the covenant so they would be prosperous, enjoy peace and happiness, have abundance of food, and be a pattern to the world as God's representative. Solomon's sermon addressed the practical results Israel would experience depending on their attitude and response in serving the Lord or not. Elijah addressed Israel on the problem of "limping" between serving God or Baal. The drought, he said, was the result of their indecision. Amos and Jeremiah preached about the calamities that Israel was suffering as a result of their disobedience to the covenant. Famine, pestilence, death,

¹Ellen G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 39.

²Idem, Gospel Workers, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1936), 153.

and captivity were already in place, and worse would come if the people did not turn back to the Lord.

In the New Testament, we find Jesus, Peter, and Paul addressing practical aspects and needs in the lives of their hearers (Matt 5-7; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 24:24, 25).

In order to address the practical needs and concerns of his/her congregation, a preacher would do well to apply some of the suggestions made by Craig Skinner in his book The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit:

- a. The first basic rule is to preach to ourselves.
- b. Remember that there are ages and stages of maturity.
- c. Insight into needs may come from many spheres of knowledge, but the revelation in Scripture must be a major source.
- d. Pastoral care will discover needs.
- e. It is the preacher's identity with the congregational life that will help him to know their needs.
- f. God guides us to needs through prayerful concern.¹

Old Testament preaching fits very well into our contemporary setting for it addresses the practical aspects of everyday life, people's needs as they go about their everyday life, and also their preparation for the hereafter.

¹Craig Skinner, The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973), 125-132.

6. Use of illustrations. If there is one point where homileticians are united, it is on the use of illustrations. Invariably, they include this item for sermon preparation and presentation. For instance, Robinson presents several reasons why illustrations should be used in a sermon:

One means of earthing our sermons lies in the use of illustrations. Well-chosen, skillfully used illustrations restate, explain, validate, or apply ideas by relating them to tangible experiences.

An illustration, like the picture on television, makes clear what the speaker explains.

Illustrations render truth believable.

Illustrations apply ideas to experience.

Illustrations aid memory, stir emotion, create need, hold attention, and establish rapport between speaker and hearer.

Illustrations should be understandable. Through examples we clarify the unknown with the known.

Illustrations should be convincing. As much as lies in him, the preacher should be sure of his facts.

Illustrations should be appropriate to the theme of the sermon and to the audience.¹

Illustrations fill at least four main purposes or functions in a sermon, they

- a. Make truth easier to understand.
- b. Help people retain truth longer.
- c. Help hold attention.

¹H. Robinson, 149, 152.

d. Motivate people by adding emotion to the preacher's logic.'

All our Old Testament preachers made abundant use of illustration. Moses and Joshua illustrated their sermons with facts from history; so did Solomon. Amos and Jeremiah used illustrations from history and also from events in real life at their time. Elijah used an object-lesson employing the bulls, altars, and actual prayers. Today these object-lesson illustrations could be compared to audio-visual materials, or objects a preacher takes with himself to the pulpit showing and explaining them in relation to the subject of his sermon.

Inasmuch as congregations today are conditioned by viewing television, the need for sermons that contain illustrations seems greater than in Old Testament times.

7. Some dialogue (style). A dialogue is a form of speech or communication in which at least two people talk back and forth. Dialogue appeals to the senses when used in a sermon. It attracts attention and helps people get involved, drawing the listener into the subject, perhaps because dialogue is so common in real life (it is always a discussion about someone or something).

'Floyd Brezee, Ministerial Director at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Lecture given in a Worker's Meeting for the Potomac Conference at Williamsburg, Virginia, January 9-13, 1987.

Out of the seven sermons above, four contain some form of dialogue. These forms of dialogue fall into two categories:

a. Dialogue where only one person supplies both sides of a conversation (Jer 8:12-22; 9:12-16; Deut 29:24-28).

b. Real (live) dialogue between the preacher and the congregation (Joshua, Elijah, and Haggai).

As in Old Testament times, people today respond favorably to sermons containing some form of dialogue. It is one of the most common ways of speech and communication. Homileticians argue in favor of its use when communicating God's word.¹

8. Call for urgent decision. Our Old Testament preachers urged their audiences to make an immediate decision, hopefully for the better.

Moses used expressions like "Today I set before you, life and death." Joshua said, "Choose today." Elijah challenged Israel to decide "right away" who was the true God, the Lord or Baal. Amos and Jeremiah were not so specific regarding immediacy, yet even they implied the

¹For instance: Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, Inductive Preaching (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1986).

Jay E. Adams, Preaching with Purpose (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982).

necessity for urgent and immediate decision in order to avoid greater catastrophes and destruction.

The problem of sin is very serious. Everybody is a sinner (Rom 3:23) and thus doomed to death (Rom 6:23). The only way to avoid final eternal destruction is to accept salvation, which is freely offered by God (Deut 30:15; John 3:16).

Human life is so fragile that the Bible compares it to the life of grass (Ps 103:15; Isa 40:6, 7). In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus warned us all that we could die tonight (Luke 12:16-20). The truest thing about life is that even a living person (who does not live till the second coming) is going to die, and may do so suddenly.

The counsel given in Heb 3:15 is very appropriate: "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Considering that the coming of the Lord is at hand and people must be ready to meet Him, it is good that a preacher today call his/her listeners to an immediate decision. Tomorrow may be too late (cf. Rom 13:11-14). While grace is still available and opportunity lasts, people should be urged to take a stand on God's side for their own good.

Now the minister is not merely to present the Word of God in such a manner as to convince of sin in a general way, but he is to lift up Christ before his hearers. Christ's claims upon them are to be made plain. The people should be urged to decide just now to be on the Lord's side.'

¹Ellen G. White, Evangelism (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 283.

9. Call to action. To make sense and be valid, a decision must be followed by action. The Old Testament preachers explored this aspect in their sermons also, with clarity and directness. Moses used four verbs to tell the people what they could do, "choose," "love," "obey," and "cleave." Joshua said "choose" and "put away" (the idols). Solomon urged the people to "let" (their hearts) "be wholly true to the Lord," "walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments". Amos and Jeremiah were not so explicit, but they did argue that the Lord had already "roared," so something worse was impending (Amos 4:4, 8), and the Lord "our God has doomed us to perish" (Jer 8:14).

Today people want and need to know what they should do. The question of the jailer in Philippi is still valid, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Out of love and concern, a preacher should tell the people what it means to accept Christ with all the implication of accepting Him in obedience and service for others. On the other hand, there are people like those in the time of Isaiah who do not want to know what to do (cf. Isa 30:10, 11), for they are not interested in knowing the Lord and accepting His free gift of salvation. Nevertheless, a preacher's duty is to tell people what to do. This was the mission given to the Old Testament prophets as well as to the disciples in New Testament times (cf. Matt 28:20, where Jesus commanded His

disciples to teach people "to observe all that I have commanded you").

In every discourse fervent appeals should be made to the people to forsake their sins and turn to Christ. The popular sins and indulgences of our day should be condemned, and practical godliness enforced.¹

10. Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect. God as Redeemer is the core of all these Old Testament sermons.

Throughout the history of Israel, time and again, the people broke the covenant relationship. But God was always there trying to have His people abide by the covenant. Time and again He delivered them from their enemies. Notwithstanding the status of people as dust and sinners, God did everything and anything for Israel in order to bring them back to Him and have them happy. He kept the rain from falling; He allowed persecution by surrounding nations; He even permitted the whole nation to go into captivity, but even this punishment was allowed in order to teach Israel that there is nothing better than serving the Lord, and God brought them back to their own land (cf. Jer 25; Dan 9:24, 25). Over and over again, God sent the prophets to tell the people about His love for them.

The Old Testament always reveals the relationship of grace and law (or obedience). Salvation is always a gift from God, one offered in such love and in a manner that presupposes people will respond favorably to it (cf. John

¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies, 4:396.

3:26-18; John 15:4, 5; Rom 3:31). Jesus and the New Testament preachers did not add anything to this aspect of preaching. They referred back to the Old Testament, to how God in His mercy sent His prophets to tell the people about His love and concern, and how their messages were despised (cp. Matt 23:34, 35; Acts 4:4-13; 7:51-56). The New Testament simply enlarges on this principle of preaching, presenting Jesus Christ as the ultimate expression of God's redeeming character.

As preachers today present the love of God and His redemptive acts in the Old Testament history, they enhance their congregation's understanding of the work, death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus as the consummation of God's demonstration of love and His redemptive character.

The Old Testament sermons studied here did not follow the organization pattern so popular today--dividing the sermon into three sections. They did not follow any one pattern. Nevertheless, they blended their thoughts in a sort of "crescendo" aiming at the "resolution," that is, at having their messages accepted and obeyed by the hearers. The Old Testament sermons were based more or less on the covenant formula.

We can see now the Old Testament sermons provide an excellent model for contemporary preaching. I believe much more power would be in the pulpit today if their characteristics were used more frequently. Any sermon,

whether based on the Old Testament or on the New, can follow the principles outlined above. The preacher who thus preaches the word of God will be very successful.

PART II

**A SEGMENT OF A SYLLABUS FOR
A COURSE IN HOMILETICS**

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY

This part of this project presents a segment of a course in Homiletics that I plan to teach so students become familiar with the sermons I have selected from the Old Testament.

This course would open with an introductory lecture about this segment of the course; an overview of the syllabus would also be presented.

Lectures, assignments, etc., will then follow.

Students will be required to do some advance studying of the material to be covered in each lecture. The subjects to be presented are as follows:

1. One introductory lecture giving an overview of this segment.
2. Seven lectures on the sermons, studying the methods used in the seven selected Old Testament sermons and comparing them with contemporary preaching characteristics.
3. Six lectures analyzing and discussing sermons presented by the students.

As a study guide to the seven Old Testament sermons; a sheet of paper will be provided for each sermon listing the ten characteristics. Students are to look for these characteristics when studying the sermons, and will then be required to include them in their own sermons.

Grades will be based on:

1. Class attendance and participation.
2. Preparation and delivery of a sermon.
3. One general test on how, when, and where the characteristics of the seven sermons were used by the Old Testament preachers.

CHAPTER IV

A SEGMENT OF A SYLLABUS FOR A COURSE IN HOMILETICS

The Method of Selected Old Testament Sermons

Description: Study of the major characteristics of seven selected Old Testament sermons, with applications to contemporary preaching.

Objectives:

A. Directional

To help Seventh-day Adventist preachers become more efficient as preachers by following the Old Testament model of communicating God's word.

B. Operational

1. To familiarize preachers with different sermons from the Old Testament to discover new insights and homiletical characteristics these sermons might provide.
2. To help preachers apply these homiletical characteristics to contemporary preaching.

Content

Introduction: The necessity of getting better acquainted with the Old Testament. Goals: (a) to discover homiletical characteristics of seven selected Old Testament sermons, and (b) to apply to contemporary preaching.

PART I

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SEVEN SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT SERMONS

I. Characteristics of the Sermon

A. A study of seven Old Testament sermons to discover homiletical characteristics. The sermons are the following:

1. Moses: Deut 29, 30; The "fourth sermon"
2. Joshua: Josh 24; "Joshua's farewell address"
3. Solomon: 1 Kgs 8:12-21, 55-61; "Dedication of the temple"
4. Elijah: 1 Kgs 18:21-40; "Who is the true God?"
5. Amos: Amos 2:6-6:14; 8:4-9:15; "Call on Israel to abide by the Covenant"
6. Jeremiah: Jer 7-10; "The Temple sermon"
7. Haggai: Hag 1, 2; "Restoration of the temple."

B. An analysis of these sermons to determine the homiletical characteristics they provide.

C. Major common characteristics; a list of the main homiletical characteristics to be discussed.

D. Unique characteristics of the sermons.

E. Illustrative comparative chart.

II. Applicability of These Characteristics to Contemporary Preaching

A study of those homiletical characteristics with contemporary preaching, as analyzed in this study. The characteristics are:

1. Addressing of one specific subject
2. Clarity and simplicity
3. Only two options
4. Positive and negative aspects clearly presented
5. Practical aspects of life
6. Use of illustrations
7. Some dialogue style
8. Call for urgent decision
9. Call to action
10. Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect.

PART II

ASSIGNMENTS

- I. Paper
 - A 10-12-page paper focusing on the homiletical characteristics of the seven sermons.
- II. Sermon
 - A. Preparation and delivery of a sermon in a nearby church employing the homiletical characteristics analyzed in this study.
 - B. Report and critique of the sermon and its delivery (before the class).
- III. Other Assignments
 - A. Study of the sermons before class as directed by the teacher.
 - B. Reading of 300 pages as directed by the teacher.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

To be prepared from items available in Portuguese.

CHAPTER V

ONE FULL LECTURE

Subject: The Use of Illustrations

Today we'll have a look at the use of illustrations in preaching.

Introduction: According to the chart of major characteristics which we are discussing, Old Testament preachers made abundant use of illustration.

A preacher should never tell a story or joke for the sake of entertainment only. If he doesn't have some lesson or clarification to draw from any illustration, don't tell it. If he doesn't have something to illustrate he shouldn't illustrate at all.

Keep in mind that one of the main purposes of illustration is to make truth easier to understand. When you tell a story, tell it well, using appropriate tone of voice, dialogue, etc. A story is well told only if your listener remembers its lesson.

"Stories trigger the listener's participation in the message and thereby stimulate our creative imaginations which underlie our motivation to change."¹

Any illustration should keep the congregation moving forward with you as you develop your theme. The illustration is not your theme, it only serves the purpose of clarifying and making your theme practical in real life.

Illustrative materials can be stories, poems, personal experiences, scientific discoveries, figures of speech, etc.

A. Purposes and Functions of Illustrations

1. Make truth easier to understand

Any illustration should always clarify and help the listeners to understand better the truth the preacher is trying to convey. Illustrate comes from the latin "lux" meaning light. Illustrations must always "enlighten" the theme presented.

In his sermon, Moses warns Israel that God would send curses and chastise Israel for breaking the covenant. To make this truth clear and easy to understand, he reminded the people of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, Adma and Zeboim (Deut 29:23)--cities that had been destroyed because

¹Edward F. Marquart, Quest for Better Preaching (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 148.

of sin--and warned that the same would happen to Israel because of sin (breaking of the covenant).

2. Helps people retain truth longer

A sermon lesson is like a nail. An illustration is like a hammer that drives the nail home.

If you want your sermons to go on preaching themselves all week, use illustrations of things people will be doing that week. Relate theology and your teachings to practical aspects of everyday life. Illustrations can be the spots where the sermon puts on overalls and goes to work in the lives of people as they go about their tasks, jobs, studies, etc.

Amos is a classical example. His sermon contains seven incisive rhetorical questions employing "metaphors" drawn from both the city and the country (Amos 3:3-6).

We can all recall a sermon we heard years ago on the basis of one or more illustrations in it.

3. Helps hold attention

It's not the amount of truth we, as preachers, give that counts, but the amount the people receive or perceive. What gets attention determines action.

Everyone likes a story. Usually a story relates to some practical aspect of life, and in one way or another people identify themselves with the story, thus awakening their interest. If by some reason the attention wanders, an illustration brings the congregation back to the subject.

In the very beginning of his farewell speech, Joshua repeats Israel's history from Abraham's time down to Israel's settlement in Canaan. That was a story which was always very alive because all along Israel had witnessed God's constant care.

4. Motivate by adding emotion to logic

Everybody, young and old alike, responds favorable to good stories. Stories usually appeal to the senses; they provide room for multiple-sense appeal, so the truth we want to convey to the people goes to them through the senses as well as intellectually.

It seems that Elijah is the preacher who fits best here. He not only dramatically and boldly challenged Israel to decide whom they would serve, but he uses a live illustration. The two sacrifices and the answer by fire were more than enough to convince Israel and motivate the people to action (they killed the false prophets). And, by the way, Elijah's speech as such, was very short, while his illustration lasted almost a whole day.

B. Sources of Illustrations

1. Bible

You can illustrate your subject using some biblical character, event, or teaching found elsewhere in the Bible. (At this point ask the class to participate by trying to

remember illustrations in the Bible and possibilities for their application).

2. Denominational history

Our people need to learn God's leading and teaching in our past history. Whenever the prophets recalled God's deeds in the past, they were talking about "Denominational history."

3. File

Every preacher should have a file where he/she can keep illustrations taken from listening, reading, etc. The headings may be on topics, Bible texts, etc.

4. Congregation

By visiting people, the preacher becomes acquainted with the struggles, sorrow, problems, and joys of the people. These can furnish material for illustrations in a sermon. However, one must be very careful not to disclose personal concerns which could embarrass anyone in the congregation. Usually achievements and victories are well accepted, if told publicly.

5. Personal illustrations

Personal Illustrations are the best ones. What I mean here is illustrations in which you have been personally involved. Such illustrations have the quality of witness that cannot come from any other source. They give the ring of honesty to the truth you want to pass on to your

listeners. However, be careful not to overdo personal illustrations, and tell them in a discrete manner.

Many times "personal illustrations" are taken from the experiences of others reported to you. Because they come from real life, they are very insightful.

Be watchful and have always a note book at hand with you and write down anything that might be useful when you look for illustrations for your sermons.

C. Some Examples of the Use of Illustrations by Old Testament Preachers

Let's discuss the sermons of two preachers:

1. Joshua (Josh 24)

Joshua presents several illustrations from Israel's past history to show (enlighten) how God cared for His people in the past. He wanted the people to understand why they should continue to be faithful to God. All the illustrations are aimed at that one point. Let's read vs. 1-15. To serve the Lord was the wisest thing to do as pointed out by the illustrations. God had been so good to Israel throughout the years of their wanderings that Israel should always prefer to serve Him instead of any other god who had been unable to do any good at all to the nations around who served them.

2. Amos (3-6)

In the beginning of his sermon, Amos presents seven illustrations (metaphors) to "enlighten" and make very clear

his point about what God was about to do concerning Israel, that is, punishment because of disobedience and breaking of the covenant. There was a reason why God acted as He did. The seven illustrations he used from real life would make Israel understand and be aware of God's plan for them. Let's read Amos 3:3-6.

I want to point out another illustration in 4:11; let's read it. Here Amos recalls the story of what happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sins; how they were overthrown. God had already destroyed some Israelites because of their sins. The comparison between these two punishments and the resulting destruction (one example long ago and the other recent) were both very well known to the audience. Amos used them to clarify and impress Israel with the truth about how and what God was about to do to them because of their sins.

I want you to read the whole sermon for the next class. Pay attention to the illustrations and the truths they are to clarify. Make a list and bring it to class for discussion.

Conclusion: As we have been discussing, a sermon should contain illustrations. They serve the general purpose of enlightening and making the truth easier to understand. One can remember the message longer, it helps to hold the attention of the congregation, and so forth.

The sources of illustrations can be (1) the Bible; (2) your files; (3) your congregation; and (4) your personal experiences.

When we study and analyze Old Testament sermons, we discover that Old Testament preachers made abundant use of illustrations from real life to make their messages very clear and properly understood.

So let's keep in mind the purposes of illustrations, making proper applications throughout the sermon as did Old Testament preachers. It still works. You can go to any book on homiletics and learn the importance of illustrations in a sermon.

CHAPTER VI

TWO SERMONS

Sermon 1: "The Best Choice"

TEXT: Joshua 24:15

Introduction: The river Amazon and the chief tributary of the river Plate rise within a few hundred yards of each other, and Indians often drag their canoes from one stream to the other over the intervening strip of land. For many miles, the little rivers run in parallel channels, and it often seems as though they might unite into one. At last, a little knoll or ridge is reached, and the waterways diverge. It is difficult to judge what issues are involved in this turning-point, for it gives complexion to the entire map of South America. It has put the stamp of destiny upon some great empires. These two rivers never come within sight of each other again, emptying themselves into the sea more than two thousand miles apart.

One may say, "I am not sure, or I do not know on whose side I am, it is so difficult to find what is truth and what is false." But nobody requires that we settle difficult questions with casuistry: we are asked to take a side when we see that there are two sides and only one of

them can be taken. Furthermore, it is not a choice of the intellect; it is a choice of the will.

Once upon a time there was this old campaigner who had come to the end of his days. In the assembly of his people he gave them his last counsel, the matured warning and experience of his years. Let's turn our Bibles to Joshua 24:15 and find out this great man's last words.

I. A choice

A. Climax of Joshua's farewell sermon. This verse (Josh 24:15) summarizes all of Joshua's concern for Israel. "Choose," said he. Joshua knew that the people were nominally worshippers of Jehovah, but in very deed many of them had turned aside unto the gods of Canaan. They were in a spiritual condition similar to the Laodicean church portrayed in Revelation 3. Lukewarm is the word there and, prophetically, it applies to our church today. Too many people profess to be worshippers of God, but in reality they have turned their backs to Him by following the world in many things like fashion, intemperance, materialism, etc. In days when faith is weak and compromise is almost universal, when the sense of duty is slight or the definition of responsibility are vague, it is well that we stop to think, for there are those who will take their stand, boldly making the right choice, being on God's side.

B. Only two alternatives. In matters of everyday life, we face different situations all the time and multiple

alternatives may cross our path. It is up to us to choose. But in the spiritual realm, only two alternatives are always before us. What is the Bible but the record of the love of God, on the one hand, and the tragedy of sin, on the other? It begins with the story of a foolish choice, and its history is just the record of the yearning of God to redeem humankind from such choices with their tragic consequences and to restore humans to that blessedness and peace which can be theirs only if they choose Him. Choose therefore. Through Moses God appeals, "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil." "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God" (Deut 30:15,19).

In the New Testament we also find that there are only two alternatives. For instance, Jesus said that no one can serve "God and mammon" at the same time (Matt 6:24). And in 1 John 5:11, 12, we read the following words: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life." If you don't want to die eternally, then you have but one choice. Make, therefore, the best choice and be a child of God.

Carlyle, the great preacher, once asked a young man who was walking about listlessly what his aim in life was.

The young man replied, in a dazed sort of way, that he had no particular aim. Where upon Carlyle said, in a voice of thunder: "You have no aim in life? Then get one quick." In your outlook on life, in your purposes, your ideals, your aims, be definite. Make sure that you know what you want and then, through the Bible and with prayer, find the best way of getting it. It is not enough to know what we might or ought to do, we must be prepared to do it, and to do it at whatever cost if it means your eternal life.

C. Reason to choose God. Joshua, in this last speech, reminds the Israelites that God, the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had been with them all the way from Egypt, through the forty years of wanderings in the desert down to that day. There were conquered cities. God has driven out and destroyed its inhabitants. The Jordan River down in the valley had once dried up making a plain path for the people of Israel. There were the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, silent witnesses of those vows which now, in the presence of Joshua, they had assembled to renew. If you please, the history of Israel was denominational history. And as God led His people in the past, so He does now. From a small party, formed basically by James and Ellen White and Joseph Bates, the remnant church has grown to the point it is now. The works of God for Israel, for the remnant church, and for you individually are an unmistakable manifestation of His deep love. God has done

great things for us. Who among you is not a witness for Him? How many blessings have we not received? Remember the old favorite hymn, "Count Your Blessings, Count Them One by One?" Won't you make the best choice by serving God out of love and gratitude to Him?

II. The time of choice

A. This day. "This day," said Joshua. Today, and today only, is the time of choice. You don't know what will become of you in the future, tomorrow, or even tonight.

It is interesting to notice that other Old Testament preachers are also concerned about timing for the right choice their audiences should make. Moses, in his fourth address to Israel, uses the word today four times, implying the importance of making a decision for the Lord. Amos, though not stating a set time, urges Israel to "prepare to meet God" (Amos 4:12). Jonah, as a mouthpiece for God's message, gives only forty days to the Ninevites to repent and avoid their doom. But it is Elijah who presents the most urgent need to respond immediately when the Israelites were called to decide whom they wanted actually to serve, God or Baal. He said, "Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it" (1 Kgs 18:23). You know the story. Elijah was there, on Mount Carmel. King Ahab, the people of Israel, Baal's prophets (hundreds of them were all there). In his speech, Elijah

challenged the prophets of Baal and called on the people to choose right away whom they would to serve. Not even one day was given to them. Elijah required an immediate decision and choice, as seen in the sacrifices that were offered as soon as he stopped talking.

If you were confronted with two options, and they would determine your destiny for life or death, and you were not sure of how much time you would have before it would be too late to make the only and best choice, wouldn't you make it today, or better yet, right away?

Listen to this warning given by the servant of the Lord, Mrs. White, in Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, 216:

It is now that we must wash our robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is now that we must overcome pride, passion, and spiritual slothfulness. It is now that we must awake, and make determined effort for symmetry of character. "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." We are in a most trying position, waiting, watching for our Lord's appearing. The world is in darkness. "But ye, brethren," says Paul, "are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief." It is ever God's purpose to bring light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, and rest out of weariness, for the waiting, longing soul.

Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of the ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God--candidates for Heaven. Go forward, my brethren and merely calling your attention to the necessity of preparation. Search the Scriptures for

yourselves, that you may understand the fearful solemnity of the present hour.

If there was a time when we should choose to stand on God's side, this time is right now. Multitudes are choosing today to go through the "wide gate and the easy way, that leads to destruction" (Matt 7:13). But what about you? Notice this further thought on the same page from Mrs. White:

What are you doing, brethren, in the great work of preparation? Those who are uniting with the world, are receiving the worldly mold, and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth,--these are receiving the heavenly mold, and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. When the decree goes forth, and the stamp is impressed, their character will remain pure and spotless for eternity.

Joshua wanted to have the assurance that, prior to his death, the people of Israel would make the right choice so they could inherit Canaan forever. So now, I call you to decide today, before it is too late to give yourself fully to the Lord and inherit the heavenly Canaan which is just around the corner.

III. Joshua's inspiring example

- A. Joshua's decision. Let's read Joshua 24:15 again.

Joshua's decision was not a turning point in his life as if he were doing something different and turning around from it. It was rather, a confirmation of what he

was already doing, that is, serving the Lord. All his life Joshua had been remarkably true to God, and Israel was witness of that. The great leader, in his concern for the welfare of his people, made a last appeal to them, showing his own example of consecration, and the simplicity and dignity of his life added powerfully to the weight of his words. To compel the Israelites to avow their decision, he declared his own. A man's own personal example is eloquent beyond the power of words. Sometimes we admire the fidelity of Joshua, but we may, perhaps, forget that there was never an age in which decision for God was not equally required. It is well to admire this in someone else, but it is far better to possess it ourselves.

During his life, Joshua encountered many trials. There were emergency situations like in the crossing of the Jordan or the overthrow of Jericho. There were trials in great battles in the open field; trials in painful defeats. He could well remember how God failed him not at Ai. These trials, amidst many other great daily cares and temptations, could hardly have been small. Looking back on what God had been to him in all this, he could still say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

B. Our decision. What shall we decide today? In a vision given to Ellen G. White, she saw Jesus "pointing to the charms of Heaven, seeking to attract your eyes from the world, and saying, 'Which will ye choose, me, or the world?'"

You cannot have me and the love of the world too.' Will you sacrifice Him who died for you for the pride of life, for the treasures of world? 'Choose between me and the world; the world has no part in me'" (Testimonies for the Church, 2:494).

Commenting on our text for today she also says:

As it was in the days of ancient Israel, so it is in this age of the world. The loyal will not be carried away by the currents of evil. They will not follow Israel's example of forgetfulness; they will call to remembrance God's dealings with His people in all ages, and will walk in the way of His commandments.

The test comes to everyone. There are only two sides. On which side are you? (Testimonies for the Church, 8:120)

Each age had its man and woman whose hearts were fixed, trusting in the Lord. Look at Moses when he chose God and the eternal riches of Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt and the temporary enjoyment of the fleeting pleasures of sin. Remember Ruth, on the day she chose rather to follow her mother-in-law Naomi's God rather than be among the pagan Moabites. What about Daniel when he chose to pray to his God, as was his habit, three times a day, before the open window, watched closely by his enemies and having a death decree hanging over his head? In New Testament times, John the Baptist rises to the front for his loyalty while Pilate and Herod sink to eternal shame because of their evil and wrong choices.

Conclusion: As you can see, today we are confronted with an option to make the right choice. I wish you to make it. In his farewell speech Joshua lovingly and earnestly appealed to Israel to serve the Lord who had been so good to them. The old warrior wanted Israel to make a full commitment that very day. Time passes by quickly and we need to make the most of the opportunities, to live eternally, while they last. Joshua and other giants of faith in Bible should inspire us today because of the right choices they made.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, it is surely time for each one of us to be done with the fickleness of irresolution. Have we not had enough of deliberating, trifling, hesitation, and delay? O that every child here today, every young man and young woman, adults, older people, friends among us, today, through divine grace come to this point: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

How many of you would like to make this choice and commitment today, right now; can I see your hands? Oh, may the Spirit of God and of Jesus our Saviour confirm your decision this very moment and keep you from harm and evil, now and forever. Amen.

Sermon 2: "God or Baal?"

TEXT: 1 Kings 18:21-40

Introduction: If there was a doubtful case and you had to decide one way or another, what would you do? It's a horrible shame to leave unresolved the question whether God or the world should have your hearts.

Would it not be a disgrace to our understanding to decide whether gold or mud is of greater value? Or whether a feather bed or a bed of thorns is the more comfortable? Aren't you sure yet whether a life of sin or of holiness is more profitable both here and in the life to come?

In Lowells' Poem "The Present Crisis," are these famous lines:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, In the strife of Truth and Falsehood, for the good or evil side.

Once upon a time a powerful preacher boldly confronted the members of his congregation with their great evil of professing to serve God while at the same time worshipping Baal, with all the sins and corruption attached to Baal worship.

The Lord wanted the best for His people then as much as He does for His people today. And since the present situation of God's people is somehow similar to what happened about 700 B.C., it is appropriate to know what the

Word of God has to say. Our text today is 1 Kgs 18:21-40.

God or Baal?

I. Elijah's sermon. Let's read verse 21.

A. Summary of the sermon. Verse 21 gives us a clear picture of Elijah's message. First of all, there is a question, "How long will you go limping between two opinions?" Wasn't it time now for Israel to return completely to the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who delivered them from Egyptian bondage and gave them the land of Canaan?

Had not three and a half years of drought been enough to demonstrate which God had control of everything, including the weather? Remember that Baal was considered the god of rain and fertility. "He was the storm god, . . . Bringing the winter rains with storms and lightnings, he was held responsible for the fertility of the country" (SDA, 8:104). Yet he had been unable to provide rain for three and a half years.

So here is Elijah asking, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions?" The people of God stood at the cross-roads. Would they reject forever the God of the covenant who had blessed them all the way, or accept the powerless Baal as their master and lord?

The second half of the opening statement of Elijah's sermon is both an order and an appeal. It is an order for the people to "stop limping" and to choose which God to

worship as their true Lord. It is an appeal to them to follow consistently whichever God they would choose.

B. Today's parallel. In Revelation 3:15, 16, we find portrayed the situation of the church of Laodicea, our situation today. It is "lukewarm." Lukewarm can be a spiritual synonym of "limping." Neither hot nor cold, "lukewarm," claiming some friendship with Jesus but at the same time following the practices of the world. Yes, "limping, lukewarm."

Such a situation doesn't necessarily develop overnight. Most of us remember some days in our past experience when we were really close to God. We were overflowing with joy and happiness in our Christian experience, sharing with everyone we met the good news of heaven. But what about our spiritual situation today?

And do you know what? The great danger we face today is about insensitivity, as it was with Israel and King Ahab in that eventful day when the prophet Elijah confronted them asking, "How long" would they go "limping"? In the book Prophets and Kings we read:

The people answer him not a word. Not one in that vast assembly dare reveal loyalty to Jehovah. Like a dark cloud, deception and blindness had overspread Israel. Not all at once had this fatal apostasy closed about them, but gradually, as from time to time they had failed to heed the words of warnings and reproof that the Lord sent them. Each departure from right-doing, each refusal to repent, had deepened their guilt, and driven them farther from heaven. (p., 147)

II. Elijah's Proposal

To make up his point, Elijah introduced a proposal in the form of a dialogue, so the people was involved, although their hearts were hardened against making any kind of commitment. He presented a challenge and gave the people an opportunity to express themselves.

A. Fairness of the proposal. Let's read verses 22-24.

1. Quotation: Prophets and Kings, p. 149:

The proposal of Elijah is so reasonable that the people cannot well evade it, so they find courage to answer, "It is well spoken." The prophets of Baal dare not lift their voices in dissent.

B. False prophets test the proposal. Read verses 25-29.

1. Elijah had full control of the situation, according to verse 25. Let's read it again.

2. Prayer of the false prophets (verses 26-29). The false prophets looked like true prophets. They prepared the sacrifice; they prayed also, but notice the kind of prayers they offer; they were based on witchcraft.

What was the result of their long prayers? Nothing happened. Think it through. The prophets of Baal spent several hours shouting and screaming to Baal. Result? No fire. Baal did not answer. Baal for three and a half years could not send rain. Now it became evident he could not send fire either. It became clear that Baal was not the

Lord, the true God. Would Elijah's God, then, be the only true God?

C. Elijah's turn. Verses 30-39. Let's read them.

Like the false prophets, now Elijah also prepared an altar. No details are given for the way the false prophets prepared their altar, but notice how carefully Elijah prepared his. Note the details in verses 31-35 (read and call attention to the details). Out of concern and love for restoration of the covenant relationship, Elijah silently prepares the altar.

Then, verse 36, "at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel'." Notice the contrast between the prayers offered to Baal and Elijah's prayer to God. Let's continue, reading down to verse 38.

Result? Verse 39 (read it).

Mrs. White's comments:

No sooner is the prayer of Elijah ended, than flames of fire, like brilliant flashes of lightning, descend from heaven upon the upreared altar, consuming the sacrifice, licking up the water in the trench, and consuming even the stones of the altar. . . .

The people on the mount prostrate themselves in awe before the unseen God. They dare not continue to look upon the Heaven-sent fire. They fear that they themselves will be consumed; and, convicted of their duty to acknowledge the God of Elijah as the God of their fathers, to whom they owe allegiance, they cry out together as with one voice, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." (Prophets and Kings, 152, 153)

III. Urgent Call for Decision and Action.

In verse 40 we read (read it).

A. Decision and action. Decision and action must follow the acknowledgement of God as the supreme Lord over all. Elijah started his sermon with an order and an appeal. Now he concludes with an order again, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." The people should act according to their convictions, right away, and they did it.

If we truly want to serve the Lord, we need to get rid of every single sin in our lives. Elijah told the people to slay the prophets of Baal and added, "Let not one of them escape."

B. Motivation for Action. What motivated the people to answer so positively? Several things. They saw Elijah's firm countenance on behalf of what was right. He was a representative of the true God. They watched him preparing the altar out of twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. They saw his faith in God manifested as water was poured over the altar again and again. They saw a sacrifice offered on the altar, representing Jesus whose blood would be poured out in behalf of the twelve tribes of Israel, God's chosen people. They beheld with awe the fire coming down like lightning, consuming everything.

Love and mercy were portrayed in the sacrifice and also in God's willingness to send the fire that burned and consumed it. But also, God's power and sovereignty were displayed. So great a demonstration of who is the true God and Lord of all brought forth this confession: "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."

C. The Same Today. God's message to us today remains the same. If Elijah lived today he would ask, "How long will you be lukewarm?" "If the Lord is God," be hot and "follow Him." "But if Baal," if the world with its attractions are right, be cold and follow them.

Conclusion: My dear brethren, let's today do what Israel did about twenty-seven centuries ago. When they were confronted with their helpless situation, they confessed their acceptance of the One who was the true God.

Elijah's sermon was a call for Israel to decide once and for all about whom they wanted to serve. It called for an urgent decision with emphasis on Jesus, as portrayed in the sacrifice of the bull.

So, how many of you here today will decide to follow Jesus and Him alone in all you do and say, wherever you go? Can I see the hands of those who will make this commitment today?

Let's pray: Our Father in heaven, forgive us for limping so long between following You and the world with its

sinful ways. Accept our renewed commitment to our Lord Jesus at this very moment. Now help us by your Spirit never to depart from your side again. Grant us anew your love and grace, for we want to follow only You. For Jesus' sake.
Amen.

PART III

**CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON HOW THIS PROJECT HAS
IMPROVED MY SKILLS IN THE DELIVERY OF SERMONS AND
IN THE TEACHING OF HOMILETICS**

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

As I began to study and made a preliminary research for this project, I decided first of all to read the sermons several times and, through some exegesis, to let the texts themselves provide homiletical characteristics, whatever they would be. Once these characteristics came out, I checked my findings with other Bible commentaries. In general, my exegetical discoveries matched those of the commentaries. However, the homiletical characteristics were not pinpointed as such by any commentary. In this respect, I think I have made some contribution in the field of Biblical preaching.

Second, I compared the ten homiletical characteristics chosen for the purpose of this paper with the ones found in the seven sermons. I discovered that contemporary books on homiletics present these same characteristics as being relevant in preaching today. Sermons with these characteristics appeal to the interest and needs of the listeners. People are interested in their own welfare and in the affairs of practical life with their sorrows, troubles, joys, concerns, etc. Everyone wants to

be happy and meet the aims and goals for life. When people come to church, a sermon should address those issues which have to do with people where they are, as well as give hope for the future and in the life to come.

Today there is great emphasis in using these characteristics in a sermon (illustrations, call to action, etc.) as means of getting the attention of the people and of having the message nailed down.¹ Basically the Old Testament sermons analyzed here provided these characteristics about 3,000 years ago.

One thing that surprised me was to find that all sermons were based in the covenant and, as such, portrayed only two options: acceptance or rejection of the covenant with the consequent results of blessings or curses.

The study of these sermons helped me very much in improving my skill as a preacher in at least two main areas: (1) Give more emphasis on the Redeemer aspect. Over and over again the preachers stressed the love of God, always willing to be in covenant with His children, to protect and to bless them. As I have tried to put more and more emphasis in the Redeemer aspect when I preach, I notice in the eyes of the listeners that they are very much interested in the subject. (2) The practical nature of the sermons. They are based in past history and what God expected (in detail) of His people; also how the people were behaving and

¹Lewis and Lewis, Inductive Preaching, 19862.

detail) of His people; also how the people were behaving and which sins they should abandon and what good things they should do. As I preach pointing out specifically what God expects us to do, I notice the congregation responds more positively because they know clearly what kind of relationship God wants with them.

Concerning the teaching of homiletics, I can say that the findings of the homiletical characteristics in the sermons helped me to grasp the essence of what communication through preaching is all about. Since somehow I discovered them myself, through a personal study, they are very meaningful to me. Somehow they are part of myself now, and therefore I can teach these homiletical characteristics much more appropriately.

As a whole I enjoyed very much the research for this project. At the beginning, after having chosen the subject and having it approved by the doctoral committee, I was not sure what I was up to; but as I progressed in the study of the sermons, I got more and more excited for two main reasons: (1) as notes above, for discovering that the sermons were based in the covenant; and (2) for discovering so many homiletical characteristics in the sermons and being able to pinpoint them for myself.

I thank God for the opportunity He gave me to become better acquainted with His method of preaching. All I want is to be ever a preacher that follows His model for communicating His word.

APPENDIX

STUDY GUIDE

Sermon characteristics which the student should look for when analyzing the seven Old Testament sermons chosen for the purpose of this segment for the course in Homiletics.

1. Focus on one specific subject
2. Clarity and simplicity
3. Only two options offered
4. Positive and negative aspects clearly presented
5. Adapted to practical life
6. Use of illustrations
7. Some dialogue style
8. Call for urgent decision
9. Call to action
10. Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect.

SURVEY ON SERMON CONTENTS

(Pastors)

In your opinion, how much would a sermon displaying the following characteristics contribute to the spiritual growth of the members of the church? Circle the number that best represents your opinion in each case.

Contribution to Spiritual Growth

Characteristics in a Sermon

	<u>Nothing</u>										<u>Much</u>
Focus on one specific subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Clarity and simplicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Only two options offered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Positive and negative aspects clearly presented	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Adapted to practical life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Use of illustrations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Call for urgent decision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Call to action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

PS. If you so wish, write some additional comments in the space below, please.

SURVEY ON SERMON CONTENTS
(Church Members)

In your opinion, how much would a sermon displaying the following characteristics contribute to your personal spiritual growth? Circle the number that best represents your opinion in each case.

Contribution to Spiritual Growth

<u>Characteristics in a Sermon</u>	<u>Nothing</u>										<u>Much</u>
Focus on one specific subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Clarity and simplicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Only two options offered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Positive and negative aspects clearly presented	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Adapted to practical life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Use of illustrations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Call for urgent decision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Call to action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Emphasis on the Redeemer aspect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

PS. If you so wish, write some additional comments in the space below, please.

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