

Minor Prophets



Richard Rogers

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Minor Prophets

by Richard Rogers



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“Minor Prophets”

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This book is dedicated to
all the students
who sat through Richard Roger's class on
"Minor Prophets."



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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil

Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.



A companion workbook on the study of *Minor Prophets* by Richard Rogers is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1(800) 687-2121.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

Welcome to a twenty-four chapter study of the Minor Prophets. The beginning chapters will have some preliminary discussions as we try to understand what kind of books and what kind of men are in this study.

A study of the prophets, particularly the minor prophets, will enrich the life of anyone who applies himself to learn the teachings in these books. On the other hand, this study will only add to the confusion of those who want to use these writings as a basis for some speculation about the future. The prophets were primarily preachers of the word, “forth-tellers” of God’s word, not predictors or “fore-tellers” of the future. Because God had inspired them to speak, He also inspired them to predict. However, we will see that their primary message pertained to the needs of the people of their day.

Preliminary Stages in the Development of a Prophet

It would be good to look at some preliminary stages in the development of a prophet in the Old Testament.

Three Terms For Individuals Who Demonstrate Prophetic Traits

In the Old Testament there were three terms for individuals who demonstrated prophetic traits. These people had the ability or the task of speaking for God.

First, the prophet was called a “*man of God.*” The Hebrew

for this is “*Ish ha-Elohim.*” When Saul was looking for his father’s donkeys, the servant with him said, “. . . *‘Look, in this town there is a man of God: he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let’s go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.*’” They went to the man of God, and he told them where the donkeys were. Notice what was said about this man of God in regard to his character: “. . . *he is highly respected, and (in regard to his word) everything he says comes true*” (1 Samuel 9:6).

There were two other names used for the man of God. Both of these words are used in 1 Samuel 9:9, “*Formerly in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer,’ because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.*” The **second** and **third** designations for these men who spoke for God were “*prophet*” and “*seer*.” The word “*seer*” referred to the way a prophet received his message from God. He **saw** a vision. The word “*prophet*” referred to the way the man of God delivered his message. He **spoke**. One word deals with the eye and the other with the mouth. God asked Jeremiah, “. . . *‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ ‘I see the branch of an almond tree.’ The LORD said to me, ‘You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled’*” (Jeremiah 1:11-12). Jeremiah proclaimed that God watched over His word to perform it. He saw a vision, then had the vision explained, and finally he spoke for God. That was literally what a prophet did. He was a spokesman for God and said what God put in his mouth to say.

Aaron was Moses’ mouth to the people (cf. Exodus 4:16) and Moses’ prophet to the people (cf. Exodus 7:1). A prophet was one who spoke for God. Amos said, “*The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy?*” (Amos 3:8). Jeremiah said God woke His prophets up early every morning and sent His servants (the prophets) to speak to Israel (cf. Jeremiah 7:25 KJV).

It is interesting to note that false prophets in the Bible are normally called “*diviners*” or “*soothsayers*” (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-13). As the people of Israel crossed the Jordan River, they were forbidden to seek God’s will by divination and soothsaying. This primarily referred to one who looked for answers by things such as crystal balls, reading hands, or looking at the stars. These methods were forbidden for Israel to use as the way to seek the will and way of God.

People Who Were Instructors During The Old Covenant

It would be good to talk about the different kinds of instructors that Israel had during the Old Testament. Before Moses, Israel had the direct word from God to the patriarchs. Then Moses became the lawgiver and servant of the Lord for Israel. Israel actually had **five** different kinds of instructors. Moses served as their **first instructor**. Nehemiah taught this when he exalted Moses as the servant of God (cf. Nehemiah 8:14; 9:14). The apostle John said, “*For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17). Jesus said, “*Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?*” (John 7:19). Moses was the supreme communicator of the will of God to the people. As the Old Testament closed, Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, told the people that the Lord was going to come to judge their temple. He said, “*See, I will send you the prophet Elijah* (This will be John the Baptist.) *before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes*” (Malachi 4:5). However, before John the Baptist was sent, the people were instructed to follow the law of Moses: “*Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) for all Israel*” (Malachi 4:4). At the end of the Old Testament, they were still looking back to Sinai for the will, the way, and the covenant of God. It would be this way until Elijah (John the Baptist) began to preach.

The **second** kind of instructor for Israel was the wise men and women who gave Israel counsel from the Law. The first two wise people mentioned were women. The kings of Israel went to inquire of wise women who gave them the will and the way of God from the Law of Moses. They were not necessarily inspired in what they knew, but perhaps inspired in how they could apply it (cf. 2 Samuel 14:4-21; 20:16-22). There were wise men also. Ahithophel was the great counselor of David, and as long as David followed the counsel of Ahithophel he never lost in battle (cf. 2 Samuel 15:12-17:23). Then there was Solomon, the wisest of all counselors. He wrote the book of Proverbs which exalts wisdom (cf. Proverbs 11, 15, 20, and 26), and the wise man is honored for his wisdom in this book. The wisdom of God is found in these men and women because God had given it to them to apply His law.

The **third** kind of instructor that Israel had were the priests. A priest's primary emphasis was the law. Many times when Christians think about the Old Testament priests they think exclusively of the sacrifices the priests offered, but they had a two-fold function in which sacrifice was only a part of the work that they did (cf. Leviticus 10:8-11). By the time of the refurbishing of the temple in Hezekiah's day, the priests have been divided into twenty-four groups called "*courses*" (cf. 1 Chronicles 28:13, KJV) These groups would serve one month in the temple with duties that included sacrifices and taking care of the temple articles. A priest only served one month in offering sacrifices to God. During the other twenty-three months of his time, the priest taught the people all the decrees of the Law given through Moses.

Then the Lord said to Aaron, 'You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the

common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses' (Leviticus 10:8-11).

The priest had a two-fold purpose. He offered sacrifices, but he also declared, interpreted, and taught the Law. Malachi said,

For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty (Malachi 2:7).

The primary function of priests was not to offer sacrifices, considering the amount of time he spent involved in teaching and proclaiming God's word. He was to teach Israel what was holy, what was common, and what was profane. The work of the priest involved teaching the Law. That is why the tribe of Levi did not receive a territorial possession as the rest of the tribes did. The priests were scattered all over Israel in forty-eight cities (four cities in each of the tribal divisions). When apostasy came, the priest was responsible for the fight against it. It was his work to see that Israel knew the Law. Therefore when apostasy came, the men known as the "minor prophets" primarily blamed the priests and the prophets.

The prophets were the **fourth** kind of instructor during the Old Testament. Prophets proclaimed the Word of God for that day, the warning for that hour, and the encouragement for that moment. Their single mission was to communicate to Israel the divine word of Jehovah. Micah talked about the false prophets of Israel and how they prophesied for money. They prophesied for the rewards that the people would bring them (cf. Micah 3:6-7). The false prophets spoke the words the people wanted to hear. Micah assured Israel that **he** was not that kind of prophet: "*But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit*

of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8). The prophets declared the divine word of God concerning Israel’s state of sin and transgression, pointed them back to the Law, and called for repentance.

The **fifth** and last kind of instructor in the Old Testament was the psalmists and poets. This included not only David, but all the men in the Old Testament who wrote poetry to God. Psalms and poetry were the expressions of the deepest emotions and feelings of the human spirit that were in tune with God’s Spirit. Some of the psalms reflected upon man and his relationship with God. Some expressed the need that the psalmist himself had for God. Many of the prophets foretold the coming kingdom of God, but all the psalmists sought to glorify God.

Moses gave people the Law. Wise women and men applied that law to the particular situation that the people were experiencing. Priests circulated among the people day after day teaching them the Law. Prophets called the people to repentance for violating the Law. And the psalmists and poets expressed the deep inner feelings which were brought about through the Law and the relationship that the people had with God. These were the instructors of the Old Testament for Israel.

Development of the Prophetic Office

Non-Literary Prophets Who Were Founders of the Hebrew Nation

Another point of introduction in studying the Minor Prophets is the discussion of non-literary prophets. These were prophets who spoke God’s word but did not write it down. They were the founders of the Hebrew nation — men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet (cf. Genesis 20:7). Isaac and Jacob were declared to be prophets of God (cf. Psalms 105:6-15).

Moses Was a Unique Prophet

Moses also spoke things to Israel which he later wrote down. He stands in a class all by himself. Moses was a unique prophet. There was no one else like him until Jesus came. God explained just how unique Moses was to Aaron and Miriam, who was called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, when there was a dispute between the three after Moses married a Cushite woman.

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 'Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?' they asked. 'Hasn't he also spoken through us?' And the LORD heard this. (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, 'Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.' So the three of them came out. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward he said, 'Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions. I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?' (Numbers 12:1-8).

God told Miriam and Aaron that all of the prophets after Moses would get their words from a vision or a dream. This was not the case with Moses. God said, "I speak with Moses as one man speaks to another man, face to face, clearly and not in any riddles." God told Moses, "*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my*

words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). Between Moses and Christ, all the prophets got their words through visions and revelation. The prophet Hosea said that God brought Israel up out of Egypt “. . . *by a prophet,*” (Hosea 12:13), and He preserved them in the land through the prophets.

Prophets in the Period of the Judges

During the period of the judges, Deborah and an unnamed prophet were two of the many non-literary prophets. Deborah was not only a judge for Israel, but she was a prophetess (cf. Judges 4:4). She sat under a tree and all of Israel came to be taught by her. Later God sent the Israelites an unnamed prophet when they cried out because of Midian (cf. Judges 6:8).

At the end of the period of judges and at the beginning of the monarchy, a group of people called prophetic bands or sons of the prophets began to develop. They gathered around the prophet to absorb his spirit. God would call some of them occasionally and send them to do particular tasks (cf. 1 Samuel 10:10, 1 Samuel 19:20, 1 Kings 20:13-43, and 2 Kings 2:3,7,15).

Samuel was a prophet-judge. Peter said, “*Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days*” (Acts 3:24). Peter dated the beginning of the prophetic office with Samuel. He was both *transitional* and *foundational*. He was the figure of all that was to come. He was the first in a long line of prophets who would deal directly with the rulers of Israel.

In The Period of the Kings

There is a long line of prophets during the period of the kings who were also non-literary prophets. From David to the division of the kingdom, there were men like Nathan, Gad, and Ahijah. Nathan rebuked David because of his sin with Bathsheba (cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-13), prophesied to David that the

Messiah would come from his loins (cf. 2 Samuel 7:5-17), and anointed Solomon to be the ruler of all of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 1:38-40). Gad rebuked David for numbering Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 24:11-17). Ahijah revealed God's plan for the ten tribes to Jeroboam (cf. 1 Kings 11:29-33).

Between the division of the monarchy and the time of Amos, there was Shemaiah, Jehu, Micaiah, Eliezer, Jonah, Elijah, and Elisha. Shemaiah prophesied to Rehoboam about not fighting Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:22-24). Jehu declared Baasha's doom (cf. 1 Kings 16:7) and rebuked Jehoshaphat for the alliance with Ahab (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:1-3). Micaiah stood against the Baal prophets of Ahab and the prophet Zedekiah (cf. 1 Kings 22:8-28). Eliezer rebuked Jeroboam for his alliance with Ahaziah (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:37). Jonah was the counselor to Jeroboam II (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). Elijah accomplished many things, and Elisha followed in his stead. Elijah rebuked the kings, and Elisha was the counselor of the kings. All of this indicated the developing role of the prophets. They spoke to consciences of everyone about the fact that they continually violated the Law. The prophets rebuked kings and people alike.

The Basic Purpose of Prophecy

Our Calling and Election

The **basic purpose** of prophecy can be found in the New Testament. Peter gives a three-fold purpose for prophetic messages. The messages tell of the **redemption** of God's people in the past, present and future. They give **courage** and **patience** to God's people in all ages. The words of the prophets were spoken for God's people in the past, but they are written for the admonition and learning of God's people today.

*His divine power has given **us** everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who*

*called **us** by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given **us** his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3-11). [emphasis added]*

Peter said that all things are provided for “**us**” by God’s power. He said diligent effort is required for growth into the likeness of God. He said God will protect **us** and give **us** a welcome into His eternal kingdom.

The Place of Prophecy In Redemption

Peter also talked about the place of prophecy in our redemption.

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body

because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (He says that there is need for a constant reminder of the things that he has told them in the past.) We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (Then Peter described this majesty.) For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (2 Peter 1:12-17).

This was a tremendous witness and evidence of the power of God. Peter was an eyewitness. However, Peter said there was something even more certain than an eyewitness account.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).

What do these verses teach about prophecy? **Number one**, that it was a more sure witness than if there had been an eyewitness of Jesus' glory. **Number two**, the word of prophesy deserved attention for it was a light shining in the darkness. It was a light leading to greater light. That greater light was, and still is, Jesus the morning star (cf. 2 Peter 1:19). During the dark days in which Christians lived during the first century and

in this present age, Christians need to pay attention to the prophetic word. The word of the prophets has been fulfilled in Christ.

Peter made three statements about what prophecy is **not**. **First**, he said that prophecy was not a product of man's intellect. The prophet did not study something, then speak or write his word from God. The prophet did not preach a sermon. He did not go to the Word and find an outline on what the Word said, complete with illustrations and a conclusion. Prophecy was not the product of man's study. It was certainly not the product of man's intellect.

Second, Peter said prophecy was not the product of man's desire: "*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, . . .*" (2 Peter 1:21). Man did not decide within himself to say, "There needs to be a prophecy. I will give a prophecy." It never sprang out of man's desire for God's word to be known. A man can desire to be inspired, but that desire does not bring about the prophecy.

Third, Peter also said that prophecy was not a product of man's power or his ability. Man was picked up and carried along by God. Man's power and ability had nothing to do with prophecy. Prophecy was not the product of man's intellect, desire, or power. God called intelligent people, but it was not their intelligence that gave them the words they spoke. God called people who wanted God to speak to the people, but that was not the source of their message. God called powerful men like Micah, Amos, and Isaiah to preach, but their power was not the source of the origin of their message. Every prophet was chosen, commissioned, and empowered by God. All prophetic words came from God.

Christians need to know that prophecy was not man's word, nor man's reflection on God's word. It was literally nothing more than men using their mouths to speak for God. They were voices crying in the wilderness, "Come back to God."

The Three-fold Purpose for Prophetic Messages

From 2 Peter 1:19-21 there are three purposes given for prophetic messages.

First, the prophets came for redemption. They came because Israel was lost, being mired in their sin and in their apostasy. The prophets came to lift them out of that mire and bring them back to God for redemption. Peter's point was that the purpose of the Old Testament prophets was not only redemption for Israel in their day, but redemption for God's people in every age. God's children need to take heed to the light furnished through the prophetic word and be lifted out of the mire of sin and apostasy by God.

Second, the prophets came to give courage to God's people. The people were fearful because they were surrounded by wickedness and evil. Peter said this not only for the people during the prophet's time, it is for every child of God. Christians need to read the prophets to receive courage.

Third, the prophets came to give Israel patience. Peter said the prophets spoke to give Israel the patience and ability to stay firm through all the trials. When children of God read of Isaiah and Jeremiah's persecutions, they learn that God will indeed care for them. These words were spoken to the Israelites, but they were also written for our admonition. They were written for those upon whom the end of the ages come.

Studying the minor prophets is not just ancient history. It is studying the principles by which God leads Israel to Himself, and the principles by which He leads His children to Himself. This kind of study can give great peace. May God bless that peace.

THE ORIGIN OF OFFICE AND THE TEST OF THE PROPHET

The Origin Of The Prophetic Office

Moses was not only the leader of the people of Israel, he was also their ruler. He was the person through whom God communicated to the people (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-22). Moses gave the people Gods laws and conveyed His word and His will to them. His position could not be filled by a priest or a king. Therefore, when Moses was gone, there was a need for someone to stand between God and the people as the channel through whom Divine communication would pass. God told Moses that the office of a prophet would be established among the nation of Israel when they entered the Promised Land so that He could continue to communicate His will to His people through selected men (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

Israel's Method of Approaching God

Detestable Forbidden Approaches to the Divine Will

The people of the land Israel was preparing to enter approached their gods in detestable and forbidden ways. God told Moses that He would not allow His children to approach Him in this manner.

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens,

engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or one who is a medium or spiritist, or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices, the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

There were nine approaches listed that God told the people He would not accept. These things were forbidden, and they were eventually the reason the tribes were driven from the land.

First, God said, *“Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, . . .”* (human sacrificing). There are other references where human sacrifices are forbidden.” (cf. Deuteronomy 12:31, Leviticus 18:21, 2 Kings 17:17, Jeremiah 32:35). It was the pagan belief that the gods needed to be satisfied because of the evil one had done. The people in the land were trying to get close to their gods by offering them whatever was closest to their hearts. They offered the supreme sacrifice, their own children.

Second, God said, *“Let no one be found among you . . . who practices divination, . . .”* The word *divination* meant the art of obtaining secret knowledge by lot, to cast dice or to cast bones. It was a way used to determine the will of God. This would be like modern witchcraft. This practice was also condemned in Numbers 22:7 and 2 Kings 17:16-17. God’s people were not to seek God through divination.

Third, God said, *“Let no one be found among you . . . who practices . . . sorcery, . . .”* The New King James Version translates this as a *soothsayer*.” By definition this was someone who tried to determine God’s will by inspecting something. It was like the modern palm reader who tries to determine the will of God by the length or the type of lines that are in one’s hand. This was also condemned in Ezekiel 21:21.

Fourth, God said, *“Let no one . . . (try to find out My will*

by) . . . *interpreting omens*, . . .” This literally meant to guess by signs, which would be to interpret life by what was happening in the sky. That is modern-day astrology. Israel was condemned for trying to interpret the stars to find out what life held for them (cf. Genesis 44:5; Numbers 24:1).

Fifth, God said, “*Let no one be found among you who . . . engages in witchcraft*, . . .” This literally meant to enchant and claim to heal disease. This same thing was condemned in Galatians 5:20 which dealt with medication and drug induced trances. As a matter of fact, the word that is translated “*witchcraft*” is the word that the modern day word “pharmacy” comes from. There were people then who tried to “get outside themselves and close to the Divine” by getting involved in drugs that would induce trances so that they could see the will of God.

Sixth, God said, “*Let no one be found among you who . . . casts spells*,. . .” These words literally meant the tying of knots. These people were like modern voodoo cults that have an emblem or a figure that they would stick needles into to cast spells on people.

Seventh, God said, “*Let no one be found among you . . . who is a medium* . . .” This forbidden practice is difficult to explain. The same word, “*medium*,” is found in Ezekiel 21:21. Some scholars say that it was probably the practicing of ventriloquism. The person would pretend to have a spirit within him and would cast the spirit’s voice to different parts of the room to fool people.

Eighth, God said, “*Let no one be found among you . . . who is a . . . spiritist*, . . . The word “*spiritist*” is from the Hebrew word which means to know. Let there be no one who tried to predict the future. That person would look into a hand, a crystal ball, or perhaps into himself to try to tell what the future held.

Ninth, God said, “*Let no one be found among you . . . who consults the dead*.” “*Consult*” meant to seek, ask, or worship.

This referred to the belief that all life was produced by a spiritual force or that **all things** have a soul. This is a belief that pervades the pagan world. It simply meant to inquire of the dead as Saul did in 1 Samuel 28 when he contacted the witch of Endor.

These practices were forbidden to Israel. The people were not to seek the will of God in any of these ways. The most applicable modern parallel to this is the worship of the devil or the worship of demons.

The Divine Provision the Prophet

As the Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan River, God gave them instructions forbidding them to seek Him through occult or mystic ways. If they were forbidden to use the pagan ways to find out God's will in their lives, how were they to seek Him? They would need a spokesman from God when Moses was gone. Moses was the one who spoke to them about this problem.

The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you so to do. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, Let us not hear the word of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die. The LORD said to me, What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything that I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded

him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death (Deuteronomy 18:14-20).

Moses began with a prohibition. He said that Israel could not do as the nations of Canaan did. They could not seek God through sorcery or by divination. God said, “I will provide for them a prophet. That prophet will be like you, Moses. That prophet will be from among my people.” The new prophet would be a Jew just as they were.

No prophet came from outside the Jewish people to speak to Israel. The Israelite prophets, like Jonah, went to foreign nations to speak, but no one from a foreign nation came to speak to the Israelites in the name of God. The prophets sent by God were men who were like Moses – they were faithful to God. God gave this order, “This prophet will speak only for Me and only from Me. If anyone does not listen to the prophet that I speak to, then that man will be accountable to Me. But if any prophet speaks from another god or does not speak the word that I give him, then that prophet must die” (cf. Deuteronomy 18:19-20).

Notice what God said about the prophet. He would be raised up by God, and he would speak for God. He would be an Israelite like Moses. He would speak by no other name, and he would speak only the words that God gave him to speak. That is why if someone did not listen to the prophet, God would hold that person accountable to Him. He would not be disregarding the prophet’s word. He would be disregarding the Word of God. The prophet spoke for God.

God gave the people instructions on how to tell if a man who claimed to be a prophet was truly from God. If an Israelite crossed the Jordan River and met a man who claimed to speak for God, they were to test the genuineness of this man:

You may say to yourselves, How can we know when a

message has not been spoken by the LORD? If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or does not come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

Many people could claim to speak for God and predict the future. The Israelites knew that a prophet was from God if every one of his words came to pass.

Gods Prophet Moses

Moses was a man like no other man in all of history. There are several passages about God's estimation of Moses.

Since, then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

Moses was a prophet who received his word not by visions, but by face to face revelation and discussion with God (cf. Numbers 12:8). When Jesus was transfigured, Moses was on one side and Elijah on the other (cf. Matthew 17:3). The writer of Hebrews said, "*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future*" (Hebrews 3:5). The redeemed will sing about the relationship between the two prophets that saw God face to face,

... those who were victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses

the servant of God and the song of the Lamb
(Revelation 15:3-4).

Moses was a unique person because he held a unique place with God. He was second only to Jesus as a prophet. That was why Peter wanted to build three tabernacles: one to Moses (the Law), one to Elijah (the prophets), and one to Jesus (the son of God). The voice from heaven said, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him”* (Matthew 17:4-5). Jesus was the only prophet superior to Moses.

An Eight-Point Biblical Test of the Prophet

Biblically, there was and still is a way that the man who claimed to speak in the name of God could be tested. Look at this eight point biblical test of a prophet.

First, a prophet of God spoke only in the Lord’s name (cf. Deuteronomy 18:20). If any prophet spoke in any name other than the name of God, the people knew immediately that he was not a prophet from God. God’s prophets did not speak in their own names, and they did not claim any authority other than God’s. What distinguished the prophets of God from all other prophets were statements like: *LORD says*, *“This is what the LORD Almighty says*, *‘This is what I’ve heard from the LORD,’* and *‘This is the word of God to you.’* They never spoke without giving the credit to God. In Haggai the phrases, *‘This is what the LORD Almighty says . . .’* and *‘. . . declares the LORD’* were used eighteen times. Over half of the verses found in Haggai are attributed directly to the Lord. It seems redundant for the prophet to say, *“In the LORD’s name, ‘declares the LORD’* and *‘This is what the LORD Almighty says’* over and over again. However, the redundancy had a purpose so that the people would know that the Word was from God and not from the man who spoke for God.

Second, the prophets spoke only by revelation (cf. Deuteronomy 18:20). They received their messages through a

vision from God. God said, “. . . *When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams*” (Numbers 12:6). Amos said, “*Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets*” (Amos 3:7). God revealed His message to the prophet. The prophet could not claim, “I have studied the word, and this is what it says,” but instead he said, “The Lord spoke to me, and I saw a vision. That vision was explained, and I have come to tell it to you. This is what God has revealed to me.” The message did not come by the prophet’s work or study time. It came by revelation normally at night. God would wake up His prophet to give him His message.

Third, the true test was that his moral character was undeniable. His life backed up what he said. There was not a breath of moral criticism against any of the prophets of God. The people would say that he was crazy and mock him, but they never accused any of the prophets of immorality. The man lived the message. That is a subjective proof, but it is a proof. The prophets of God lived the message they proclaimed.

Fourth, the prophet was always conscious of the divine call of God. The prophet Amos said, “*The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken, who can but prophesy?*” (Amos 3:8). Amos did not want to do what he was doing. He was like Jeremiah in that he did not really want to be a prophet, but he had no choice because God called him. God gave him a revelation to tell him, “*I want you to go preach to my people, Israel.*”

Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.’ Amos answered Amaziah, ‘I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore fig trees.

But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' Now then, hear the word of the LORD.' (Amos 7:12-13).

Amos had no choice but to speak for God. Jeremiah was also a reluctant prophet. He wanted to quit, but he said,

But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot' (Jeremiah 20:9).

He discovered that he could not quit. Jeremiah had to prophesy because he was conscious of the divine call of God.

Fifth, the prophet's word was often confirmed by signs or miracles. However not all prophets were confirmed in this way. John the Baptist was a prophet, but he performed no signs or miracles (cf. John 10:41). Moses was given the ability by God to perform miracles that proved he was the spokesman of God. Elijah performed many miracles, as did Elisha. After Elisha died his bones were put in a cave, and one day as the Syrians were running from the Moabites, they threw a man who had been killed into the cave. The man fell on Elisha's bones, and he came to life (cf. 2 Kings 13:20-21). This was God saying, "*There is My prophet who speaks for Me.*" That is what Nicodemus knew about Jesus: "*. . . Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him*" (John 3:2). This was a true statement because the word of the prophet was often confirmed by signs and miracles.

Sixth, a prophet's message was in harmony with all previous revelation. This is best described in Deuteronomy 13:1-3a. A prophet's word was in agreement with all other words.

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, Let us follow other gods (gods you have not known) and let us worship them, you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer.

If the prophet's words came to pass, but he urged the people to follow other gods, then he was not to be listened to. This was also a test for the people.

The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 13:3b-5).

God was telling the people that if a prophet spoke and his word came to pass; and if he performed a miraculous sign that could not be denied because it was seen by the people; and then even after all that, if that prophet said something that contradicted anything that God had said or contradicted another revelation from God, then the people were not to listen to that prophet. Instead, the prophet was to be stoned. If a man could go out today to the cemetery and raise every dead person there, and yet he preached things contrary to God's revealed word, the people of God should not listen to him. He can not be a prophet from God if he speaks

things contrary to God's revealed Word. Every prophet of God's word agrees with the all the other prophets of God.

Seventh, a prophet's message was confirmed by historical events (cf. Deuteronomy 18:21-22). If a prophet spoke and that word did not come to pass, the people should not be afraid of that prophet. He was a false prophet. Jeremiah was carrying a yoke about his neck saying that God would yoke Israel with Babylon. Hananiah, the false prophet, broke the yoke and said that God would not do it. Jeremiah got himself a yoke of iron and said, "Try to break this one. You will die before the year is over." This all happened just as Jeremiah said it would (cf. Jeremiah 28:1-17).

Eight, the moral quality of the message the prophet preached showed the difference between the true and the false prophets. This test was also subjective, but it was still a proof. The message of the prophet was always a moral one.

The Characteristics of the False Prophet

There are some characteristics that stand out to mark a false prophet in contrast to the characteristics of a true prophet.

The false prophet was a mercenary (cf. Micah 3:5-11) and was often a drunkard (cf. Isaiah 27:7). The false prophet conspired to conceive visions of the Lord for his own selfish reasons (cf. Ezekiel 22:5). The false prophet walked in adultery and lies and walked as an evil doer (cf. Jeremiah 23:14). The false prophet was light (he did not have much depth) and treacherous (cf. Zephaniah 3:4).

The false prophet was a religious opportunist who preached what the people wanted to hear. This happens often today. There are preachers who preach what they preach because they know it is what the people desire to hear. Jeremiah wrote

A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, and the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end? (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

THE MEN AND THE BOOKS

The Character of the Prophets

This study of “The Twelve Minor Prophets” deals with a group of men who are usually labeled as the “minor prophets,” but the term “minor” does not apply to the prophets themselves. The term “minor” does not apply to the doctrines contained in these books. These twelve are “minor” only in the length of each book. Some of the greatest statements in all of scripture are found in these books. The twelve books taken as a whole are smaller than the books of Isaiah or Jeremiah. That may be why Israel called these twelve “The Prophets” or “The Twelve.” That is why they were always grouped as a single entity or one book.

They Were All Human

These twelve men were all human. Some might think that this is a silly, obvious statement. However, the men of the Bible are sometimes treated as if they were fairy-tale characters, but these were men of flesh and blood. These were men who hurt and felt as any other human might feel. They had the same kind of existence that any other man had — the same temptations, troubles, and trials. However, they were men of such high character that they often make people today feel uncomfortable, so it is easier to make them seem unreal rather than real human beings.

Someone has jokingly said that there are three classes of people: men, women, and preachers. Sometimes preachers consider themselves to be different, and people do consider them to be different. James said, “*Elijah was a man of like*

passions with us, . . .” (James 5:17 ASV). The New International Version translates this: “*Elijah was a man just like us.*” That is sometimes hard to remember in studying men like Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah. They seem to come from another world, but the prophets were human beings.

The Prophets Were Uncompromising Individuals

The prophets were often men who had to stand alone. Amos is a good illustration of that. He was a shepherd from the southern part of Judah, who was called by God to go preach in the urban city of Samaria. When he arrived, he smelled like sheep and was wearing shepherd’s clothing. He did not preach in the streets, but instead went to preach in the temple of the occult god. This was the king’s church, where he faced the number one prophet of that land, Amaziah.

Amos preached that Jeroboam would die by the sword and that Israel would go into exile (cf. Amos 7:11). That was not a very popular thing to say, so Amaziah confronted him. Amaziah, who was the hired priest of the king’s temple, said to Amos, “. . . ‘*Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there*’” (Amos 7:12). Amaziah only thought of preaching for the money involved, and that was the way he viewed Amos. He was saying, “We’re not going to pay you, so why are you preaching here?” Amos responded as an uncompromising individual, who had to stand alone.

. . . ‘I was neither a prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd . . . (Amos was admitting his humble situation.). . . and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now, then, hear the word of the LORD . . . ’ (Amos 7:14-16a).

Micah described the difference between himself and the false prophets of that day:

This is what the LORD says: 'As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them they proclaim "peace"; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him. . . . ' The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God. But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; ' (Micah 3:5, 7-9).

The Prophets Were Conscious Of A Divine Call

Amos says that the prophets were the mouthpiece of God (cf. Amos 7:14-16). He said, "You tell me not to preach, but I don't have a choice. The Lord took me from tending the sheep. He sent me up here to preach. I preach because I have been called by God."

One of the most powerful texts that talks about the consciousness of a divine call is found in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been called by God, and because of that he had to preach even when he wanted to quit:

But I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9).

He simply said, "I cannot stay quiet; I cannot **not** preach." Luke wrote in Acts 4:18-20:

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (This command was issued directly by the Sanhedrin to Peter and John.) But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'

The original Greek is, "*I cannot **not** preach.*" There were many things that Peter could not do, but the one thing he could not do was to **not** preach. He could not **not** teach. He could not **not** speak, because he had been called by God.

They Were Men of Rugged Body and Character

The prophets were usually men of rugged body and character which called attention to them. They were often rejected by the people, and that resulted in loneliness. God took Amos from tending his sheep. He took Micah from a position of poverty where loneliness would be quite common.

When the wicked king Ahab and the good king Jehoshapat were discussing whether or not they would fight against the Ammonites, Jehoshapat listened to four hundred prophets of Baal. After hearing every one of these false prophets he said,

... 'Is there not a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?' The king of Israel (Ahab) answered Jehoshaphat, 'There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD ...' (1 Kings 22:7-8).

Where did they go to get this man? They went to the prison. When he got through preaching, where did they take him? They took him back to prison because he was a man who stood alone.

They Were Conscious Of God's Authority and Backing In All Emergencies

The prophets' contemporaries were constantly challenging the strange stance of God and His prophets, but as Jeremiah said, *"I stand here. God help me; I cannot do otherwise."* Amos said, *"The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken — who can but prophesy?"* (Amos 3:7). Amos had heard the roar of the lion; he was conscious of God's calling and authority. That is what every spokesman for God needs to hear. The lion is still roaring. Jehovah still wants someone to go and preach for Him. In Ezekiel, God looked for one man to "stand in the gap," and He found Ezekiel, who was conscious of God's authority and backing in every emergency.

These Men Were Men of Prayer and Communion With God

The prophets were men of prayer and communion with God. Loneliness caused this to happen. There is not a specific example of this in the minor prophets, but there is in Daniel. Daniel's strength came from the fact that when the king stood against him, he could talk to God. When the king's wise men stood against him, he could talk to God. When the people stood against him, he could talk to God. Even when his own mind stood against him, he could talk to God, and in talking to God in that lonely closet of prayer, the prophet found his strength to do the will of God.

The Prophets Were Clean and Consecrated In Life and In Character

Each one of the prophets lived a separate life from the world. It was no accident that Jesus, in His separated and consecrated life, was thought to be Elijah or one of the prophets. Name the prophet, and he was a person that Jesus looked like because of His moral character. The spokesmen of God today desperately need that in their lives. They need to be

conscious of the need to be an example to the people they are speaking to.

The Prophets Were Conscious of the Privilege of Access To the Inner Counsel of the Lord

The prophets knew that they told the secrets of God to God's people. When they spoke, they were speaking what they had seen from God's heart. Ezekiel is a good example of that. He was caught up into heaven itself and saw the throne scene of God. Isaiah also saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1-3). The prophet said, "This is what I have seen in my interview with God. In my divine moment of standing in the presence of God, this is what I see, and here are the secrets that God has given to me to give to you." The secrets were made known because the prophets were given the privilege of access into the inner counsel of God's mind.

They Were Outspoken Critics of Specific Evils in the Social Order

The prophets did not deal in abstracts. They were outspoken and critical of the evils of that day. The words "perhaps" or "maybe" were not found in the prophet's mouth. They were certain and outspoken critics. Amos said to Amaziah, "*Know this for sure, Israel will go captive. Your children will die, and your wife will be another man's wife.*" Micah told the leaders that they were cannibalistic, feeding off the poverty of the people. Malachi told the priests that they would offer God less than they would offer their governor if he were to come to their house. He said, "What you are doing is detestable in the sight of God." They were imprisoned, persecuted, and killed, but that did not matter. The only thing that mattered was that the people heard the word and will of God with no distortions.

They Were God's Agents in Revealing the Future

Because they were inspired of God to preach the needs of the people, they were also inspired by God to tell the future of Israel. They spoke of future judgment as they talked about the day of the Lord. They spoke of future blessings as they talked about the coming Messiah and His kingdom. That was the kind of men these prophets were.

The Mission of the Prophet: Spokesman For God

What was the work and mission of the prophet? Their mission was to speak for God. Moses said,

... 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue' (Exodus 4:10).

God answered,

'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. . . . He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him' (Exodus 4:14a, 16).

Aaron was to be Moses' spokesman as Moses stood before Pharaoh for God. In Exodus 7:1, God said, ". . . 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.' " In Exodus 4:16 he was Moses' mouth, and in Exodus 7:1 he was Moses' prophet. What was a prophet? A prophet was the mouth for God; he was God's spokesman. In Jeremiah 1:7b, God said to Jeremiah, ". . . 'You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.' " When Moses instituted the office of the prophet, God said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them

everything I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). In one phrase, the prophet’s mission is to speak for God.

God’s Spokesman For Judgment

In being God’s spokesman there were two things involved. The prophet was God’s spokesman for judgment and for salvation. As a spokesman for judgment, God said to Israel through Amos, *“You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all of your sins”* (Amos 3:2). He said, You are going to be judged because of the particular and peculiar relationship that I have with you. I know you in a way that I have known no other nation. Therefore, all of your sins are going to be accounted to you. Amos was the spokesman for this judgment from God to the people of Israel.

Hosea, speaking to the same people, said, *“. . . my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge”* (Hosea 4:6). He also says, *“You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your helper”* (Hosea 13:9). Micah said that all of Judah’s leaders were destroyed because they turned away from God. The prophet spoke to Israel:

You are doomed. You have not listened to God. You have not followed the law. You have turned away and listened to other prophets. You have turned away to follow other gods. Therefore, the day of the Lord has arrived (cf. Micah 3:1-12).

God’s Spokesman For Salvation

God’s spokesman for salvation was to give a message of hope to the obedient. God does not want to judge. It is not God’s will that anyone go to hell. God’s desire is that all men be saved (cf. II Peter 3:9), and the cross proves that to all men. Even though he lived before the time of the cross, the prophet Amos declared God’s desire to save people (cf. Amos 9:11-15). His books can be called a “blue” book or a gloomy book, since

it contains very little optimism. Amos came to declare terrible judgment. But, Amos closed his book with restoration and salvation.

'In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,' declares the LORD, who will do these things. 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,' says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11-15).

Hosea said,

. . . I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God' (Hosea 2:23b). Micah said, In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it (Micah 4:1).

Micah was saying that there was hope. There was hope in the coming Messiah.

It All Culminates In The Kingdom of God

There was hope in the coming Messiah. There was hope in

a believing people. There was hope in a mountain established above all the mountains. All of this culminated in the kingdom of God. (The writer of Hebrews reminded the Jew, the Hebrew, Israel, now a member of the church, that they are living in what Old Testament prophets had talked about, the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not in the future. It existed in the days of Hebrews 12.)

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks (Hebrews 12:22-25a).

They had come to the kingdom of God, and in that kingdom lived innumerable angels. In that kingdom lived the spirits of all the righteous and faithful men of Hebrews 11 who had been made perfect. In that kingdom God and Jesus lived. In that kingdom lived the Spirit and the church of the firstborn ones who were enrolled in heaven. It was the mission of the prophet to declare to the people the beautiful thing that awaited them in the coming kingdom of hope.

The prophet not only preached judgment to those who were disobedient, but he preached hope to those who were obedient. Someone might say, “Yes, but they all died and did not receive these promises.” That is absolutely right. That is why today their spirits are made perfect. That was why Jesus spoke to the Jews saying,

I say to you that many will come from the east and the

west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing and teeth (Matthew 8:11-12).

Therefore, Abraham and all of these righteous people are in the kingdom of God. When the prophetic word speaks of these righteous ones, they “will be” in the kingdom of God. In the New Testament passages, they “are” in the kingdom of God. The church of Jesus Christ is a part of the kingdom that fulfills all of these Old Testament prophecies.

Basic Principles for Understanding the Prophets

Number one, the prophet was a man moved and carried along by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21). He did not have to be knowledgeable, but he must be inspired.

Number two, the prophet could not introduce strange things. If a prophet came and his word or miracles came to pass, but he introduced something that was not from God, then the people were not to listen to him. Instead, they were to stone him (cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The function of the prophet was to call the people back to the Law, through the words God had given him to speak.

Number three, the prophets’ oracles always came to pass. There was never a doubt that whatever the prophets said was going to happen.

Number four, prophecy was sometimes conditional. In Jeremiah 18:5-11, God set the conditions for whether or not a prophecy would come to pass. He said, “Whenever I speak concerning a nation, to bless it or to curse it, if they don’t continue in their good, then I will not bless them. I will curse them. If they don’t continue in their evil, then I will repent of

the evil I said to do to them, and I will not do it. I will then bless them.”

Jonah said, “. . . ‘*Forty more days and Nineveh shall be overturned*’” (Jonah 3:4). But Nineveh repented, so they were allowed to exist for almost one hundred more years. Therefore, prophecy was conditional many times upon the response of the people to the prophecy itself. When God came to announce judgment on Ahab’s house, because Ahab repented, God said, “I will not destroy his house in his day, but I will destroy his house in the day of his son” (cf. 1 Kings 21:28-29). Sometimes the judgment could be prolonged or delayed because of repentance.

Number five, all of the minor prophets lived and prophesied immediately before and immediately after the Assyrian and the Babylonian exiles. The northern tribes went into Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C., and the southern tribes went into Babylonian captivity in the south in 586 B.C. They stayed in captivity until the years 537-536 B.C. All of the threats that were leveled against Israel and Judah about going into captivity were literal. The prophets were not speaking of spiritual captivity but physical captivity.

The Assyrian kings came and fulfilled Amos and Hosea’s prophecies as they carried Israel into captivity. The Babylonians came and fulfilled Hosea, Isaiah and Zephaniah’s prophecies as they removed Judah from their land and placed them in captivity. After they returned from captivity, Zechariah said,

Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? (Zechariah 1:5-6).

All of the threats of judgment in the minor prophets were fulfilled in the exiles in Assyria and Babylon. Their promises,

except for those that center in Jesus, were literal. The exile and return of the nations of Israel and Judah were literal. The prophecies of their return were fulfilled when they returned to the land (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:20).

Number six, Christ's first coming and the beginning of the church are important subjects of Old Testament prophecy. Paul told the Romans when he began his letter to them, ". . . *the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures . . .*" (Romans 1:2). Peter said, "*Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days*" (Acts 3:24). Peter was saying that their preaching was a fulfillment of prophecy.

When the prophecies talk about a coming King, they are speaking of Jesus. When they talk about a coming kingdom, it is the kingdom that Jesus established upon the earth, which is the church of the firstborn. Christ is the ideal King and the suffering Servant spoken of in Old Testament prophecy. The kingdom of God is God's house, God's mountain, God's temple, and God's sheepfold. The kingdom of God is the church of the living God.

Number seven, God's final revelation was made in His Son. The writer of Hebrews said,

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Jesus told a parable in the book of Matthew about a landowner who had a vineyard, which he rented to some farmers. When he sent his servants to get his money, the tenants beat one of them, killed another, and stoned the third one. The landowner sent other servants, and they treated them the same way. Then the landowner said, "I will send my son. They have

to respect my son. I will send him last of all.” Jesus said, “*But when the tenants saw the son coming and said, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they . . . killed the him*” (Matthew 21:38-39). The parable said they killed the son — last of all. God sent His Son, Jesus, the “last of all” the prophets, and the people killed Him. Jesus’ message was the same as every prophet who had come before Him. Jesus spoke of judgment to the wicked and salvation to the righteous. Jesus said, “I’ve got a lot of things to say to you, but He that sent me is true.” His message was “As it is written. . .” However, the people had beaten, killed, and stoned the prophets who had come before Jesus. AND the people killed Jesus as well. Jesus’ message said, “This settles the case forever.”

Jesus is the climax of all of the prophets of God. Listen to Him. Hear the word of God through Him. See the life that God would live upon the earth through Him. See Him touch the untouchable. Watch Him love the unlovable. And, therefore, watch Him do the “un-do-able” — that which seems impossible. Imitate that, and you will find peace in the Prophet Christ.

OBADIAH

Introduction

The following chapters will cover the minor prophets in chronological order. The following list is given to begin the study so that it is easy to see the placement of each prophet. The dates of the books are approximate and may be different by various authors.

The Minor Prophets in Chronological Order

Early Assyrian Period — Ninth Century B.C.

Obadiah	c. 845 B.C.
Joel	c. 830 B.C.
Jonah	c. 800-780 B.C.

Later Assyrian Period — Eight Century B.C.

Amos	c. 755 B.C.
Hosea	c. 735 B.C.
Micah	c. 725 B.C.

Chaldean Period — Seventh Century B.C.

Zephaniah	c. 625 B.C.
Nahum	c. 614 B.C.
Habakkuk	c. 608 B.C.

Post - Exile Period — Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C.

Haggai	c. 520 B.C.
Zechariah	c. 520- 516 B.C.
Malachi	c. 444 B.C.

There will be a particular pattern followed in studying each of these books. It will begin with looking at the date of the book, the outline of the book, and then the teachings from the book. The study will cover the twelve books and the men who wrote them.

The Author — Obadiah

Chapter four will cover the book of Obadiah who was one of three prophets who prophesied in the ninth century B.C., in what was called the “Early Assyrian Period.” Obadiah prophesied around 845 B.C. Obadiah was the first of the “writing prophets.” His book is the shortest of the Old Testament with only twenty-one verses. His book was not quoted at all in the New Testament. There is a possibility that verse twenty-one might be referred to in Revelation 11:15, but the book was not cited by any author in the New Testament. That does not mean that it does not have Messianic intent or content. The title in Obadiah 1:1 describes this book as a vision directed against the descendants of Edom (Esau). Obadiah describes an invasion upon the city of Jerusalem. The details of this invasion help to date the book.

The Date of Obadiah — c. 845 B.C.

There are some other characteristics of this book that help to establish the date 845 B.C.:

First, Edom was free. Most of the time, Edom was subject to Judah, but at this time Edom was free (cf. 2 Kings 8, 2 Chronicles 21). There was a time in the middle of the ninth century (850- 845 B.C.) in which Edom broke free from Judah’s control because of the weakness of Judah’s king.

Second, Obadiah described a time when Jerusalem was invaded. Their enemies carried off all the goods in the king’s palace (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:16-17). This happened in the middle of the ninth century.

Third, Obadiah discussed a time in which Jerusalem's invasion was by strangers (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:16). Foreigners entered Jerusalem and carried away its goods.

Fourth, Obadiah discussed a judgment in which captives were taken (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:17) from the city of Jerusalem in the middle of the ninth century.

The main thing that Obadiah said that separated it from other judgments upon Jerusalem was that Judah would eventually rule and control Edom and all of its possessions. Judah did eventually defeat Edom and destroy it (cf. 2 Chronicles 25:5-14). Many scholars of the Old Testament believe that this judgment was the one by Babylon in 586 B.C. Babylon fits this period, except for the fact that Judah did not conquer Edom again, so that cannot be the judgment Obadiah was talking about. When the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. is mentioned in the Bible, there are some outstanding characteristics given. None of those things were mentioned in Obadiah, and surely at least one of the characteristics of that destruction would be found if that was the destruction Obadiah was referring to.

Characteristics of 586 B.C. Babylonian

Destruction Not Found In Obadiah

First, Nebuchadnezzar and the whole Babylonian army broke down the walls around Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 25:10, Jeremiah 52:14, Nehemiah 2:15-17). **Second**, Nebuchadnezzar set fire to the king's palace (cf. 2 Kings 25:9, Jeremiah 52:13). **Third**, Nebuchadnezzar also set fire to the temple of the Lord (cf. 2 Kings 25:9, Jeremiah 52:13). **Fourth**, the Babylonians captured the king and deported him to Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 25:7). **Fifth**, they also deported the majority of the nation (cf. 2 Kings 25:11-12). **Sixth**, all the remnant that was left moved to Egypt because they were so afraid of the Babylonians (cf. 2 Kings 25:26, Jeremiah 21:16, 43:22).

Therefore, all the descriptions from the book of Obadiah fit 845 B.C., and none of the descriptions of the destruction in 586 B.C. were even mentioned in the book of Obadiah. This is the reason the book is dated 845 B.C. in this chapter. This is not eternally important, but a good Bible student wants to know. It would be good to read the history found in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles to understand and know the background in which Obadiah spoke. The reason a person speaks is important, but the historical background is also important, so that the message that the people of that time heard will make more sense. When a person hears it as they heard it, then he is better able to understand it.

The Outline of the Book

The Utter Destruction of Edom Decreed

The book of Obadiah was a vision of complete destruction against Edom. Obadiah announced God's judgment against them in verses 1 to 9. The decree that Edom would be destroyed is in verse 1. The condition of Edom was discussed in verses 2 to 4. They were despised by the other nations. They had deceived themselves into believing that they were strong, and therefore, they would be humbled by God. The judgment itself was discussed in verses 5 to 9. They would be judged in spite of their alliances, their wisdom, and their might. Their violence and conduct against their brothers in Judah were the cause of that judgment mentioned in verses 10 through 14. Edom was Esau, and Judah was Jacob. This was two brothers facing each other, and Edom was being "un-brotherly."

The terrors of the judgment were described in verses 15 and 16. This judgment was called "the day of the Lord." It was the day of final judgment upon whomever he was talking about. The final judgment of Edom had not yet come, but one day they would face the Lord, and He would have His day over them.

The Exaltation of Israel

Obadiah spoke of the exaltation of Israel in verses 17 to 21 when the kingdom would be established on Mount Zion. Edom would be destroyed, and Zion would be exalted. That is the message of the book of Obadiah. Not all of Judah would be destroyed, because a remnant would survive. This remnant would possess Edom and all of their enemies (cf. Obadiah 18-20). Then there would be the universal reign of the Lord from Mount Zion in verse 21. These are the passages that have to be referring at least to some extent to Jesus, the Messiah.

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, And Its Comfort

The theme of Obadiah is that Edom would fall because of their cruelty toward their brothers. A theme is **what** the author **is saying** to his recipients. Obadiah wanted to discuss the fall of this nation. The message is **what is heard** in the theme. This message said that God ruled in His world. God ruled, not man and not Judah and not Edom. The comfort was in the message. For Israel there was comfort in knowing that Edom would fall, and Zion would be exalted. There was comfort in knowing that God did rule the world. No matter what happened, and no matter how deeply into trouble Zion fell, they would still be exalted. That was the promise God made to the woman in Genesis 3, to Abraham in Genesis 12, and to David in 2 Samuel 17. God was making that promise to Israel. One day Zion would come back, and one day they would be exalted. The application for today is the same comfort of knowing that God is in control.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are two lessons to learn from the book of Obadiah to apply today. **Number one** is to learn the total consequence of pride. Many times pride causes trust in strongholds such as: position, wisdom, might, power, and money. However,

anything that man takes pride in except the Lord leads to destruction (cf. Proverbs 16:18).

The second lesson is the violence of silence or the sin of neutrality. This was Edom's number one problem, and the reason that God judged them. They stood by and watched while strangers attacked their own brethren in Judah. God judged them because of their ungodly conduct.

Discussion of the Text — The Teaching of the Book

The Reasons For Edom's Fall

The reason for Edom's fall was simply pride. They took pride in several things.

First, they took pride in their position and in their defenses (cf. Obadiah 1-4).

The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign LORD says about Edom — We have heard a message from the LORD: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, 'Rise, and let us go against her in battle' — 'See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, Who can bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' declares the LORD.

The Edomites lived in a city whose ruins are called Petra. That was why they could say, "*Who can bring me down to the ground?*" They were proud about the area where they lived. It was a city with high hills, lofty mountains, and steep crags. Tropical heat scorched the area. Water was scarce, which made

an attack by their enemies very difficult. They had innumerable caves that they would live in that offered refuge to the people and shade from the heat, and in which they could store an ample amount of food and water. There was a canyon that was from twelve to twenty feet wide with perpendicular walls from 200 to 250 feet high that afforded the only entrance into the city. Any enemy that came to attack them had to come in a marching column no more than twenty feet wide. It was easily defended, and if for some reason they could not defend the city, all they had to do was run up to the caves, pull the rope ladders up after them, and no one could defeat them. Only God could overcome such a formidable defense. That was why God said, *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.”* (Obadiah 4). Nobody can successfully run from God. There was no place a person could hide from the judgment of God. That is one lesson to learn from Edom.

Second, they also put their trust in their riches and wealth:

If thieves came to you, or robbers in the night—Oh, what disaster awaits you—would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! (Obadiah 5,6).

All of the soil in this area produced ample food for consumption and export (cf. 2 Kings 3, Jeremiah 49, Joel 3), which is where their wealth, and consequently their downfall came from.

In spite of all these riches and wealth, they would be destroyed. They had rich copper and iron mines at Ezion-Geber. They had great trade routes that led through Ezion-Geber, one of their major cities. One led to Egypt, and the other, the King’s Highway, went all the way to Assyria. The trading vessels

would assemble at Ezion-Geber because it was a port where ships from all over the world would come. Edom's great riches were known throughout the world (cf. 2 Kings 9-10, Isaiah 2). They had built this rich storehouse of materials, but someone was going to come and take it all away. Their riches would not deliver them.

Third, the allies and confederacies in which they trusted would not be able to deliver them: *"All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it"* (Obadiah 7). Since Edom controlled the trade routes and many of the sea lanes in that part of the world, the neighboring nations were eager to win and maintain Edom's good will. But it would be those same allies in whom Edom proudly trusted that would disappoint them and turn against them in the end. Alliances and confederacies cannot avert the judgment of God.

Fourth, Obadiah talked about the wisdom in which they trusted. He said, *"In that day, declares the LORD, 'will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?'"* (Obadiah 8). Eliphaz, the wisest of Job's counselors (cf. Job 2:11), came from this area (Teman). It seems that the land of Uz in the land of Edom was Job's home (cf. Lamentations 4:21). Human wisdom does not normally follow God's way (cf. Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 1). Those who trust in their intelligence trust in that which is not trustworthy.

Fifth, they also had pride in their military might: *"Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter"* (Obadiah 9). Their mighty men and their social, civic, and military leaders were going to be confused and seized by panic and fear, and held in the grip of blank despair that they would all perish. The proud, boastful, rich, powerful, and wise Edom would be destroyed (cf. Ezekiel 32:20). What a price to pay for pride.

As Solomon said, “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18).

The Sin Of Neutrality – The Violence Of Silence

The main lesson in Obadiah was the sin of neutrality or the violence of silence.

Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble (Obadiah 10-14).

There are three steps that Edom took on their journey toward the judgment that God was going to bring upon them.

First, they stood aloof. The American Standard Version says that they “*stood on the other side.*” In other words, they were neutral. They did not do anything. That was the first step of their journey. When they should have come to the aid of their brothers, they did nothing.

Second, they rejoiced in their brother’s calamity. It was one thing not to be concerned. It was another thing to rejoice over the evil that was being done to their brother. They stood aloof and they rejoiced.

Third, they participated in the plundering of their brother’s

goods. When their brother fell, they went into the city and participated in the looting. They did not participate in the destruction; they just profited from it. They stood aloof; they rejoiced; they participated, and **last** and most tragically of all, they turned their brothers over to the enemy. They captured their brothers and turned them over to the destroying force.

This is a very powerful lesson to learn. It is normally a sin to be neutral. When principles of righteousness are involved, dare not be neutral. When a brother is being destroyed, dare not be neutral. When the Lord is being criticized or blasphemed, dare not be neutral. When the devil is winning in the life of an individual, dare not be neutral. There are times that a Christian must take his stand for God beside his brother, not worrying about what is going to happen, nor being concerned about the outcome. If he stands by and hears Jesus or a brother maligned or criticized and does not stand up for Jesus or that brother, Obadiah said that he was just like the one doing the criticizing. A Christian must stand with his brother.

The Day of the Lord

Obadiah is the first prophet in this study to speak of the day of the Lord.

The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. The LORD has spoken. People from the Negev will occupy the

mountains of Esau, and the people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's (Obadiah 15-21).

There are two things to be learned about the day of Jehovah. **Number one**, the day of Jehovah was judgment upon the enemy. The nation of Edom, as such, would not survive the destruction that was coming on them. He was not saying that no individuals would survive. He was saying that Edom as a nation would be absolutely and totally destroyed. The nation would never stand again. The day of Jehovah was total and absolute judgment on the enemy.

Number two, the day of Jehovah was salvation for the righteous. They were promised deliverance from their enemies and holiness toward the Lord. They were promised possession of their inheritance and victory over their enemies. They were promised possession of their enemies' land and rulership of the enemies' government. However, the main reason for all of this was not their return, nor their victory. The main thing being discussed was that the kingdom is the Lord's.

There are a few questions that this raises. Does Obadiah have anything to say to the person, who in the presence of calamity, does not get involved? Contrast the dealings of God with Edom and Israel in the Old Testament. Compare the teachings of Obadiah on pride with that which is found in the rest of the Old Testament. Does the book of Obadiah have anything to say to our military age and society? The answer is, "Yes." Think about this and remember that the kingdom is the Lord's, and in it you will find peace.

JOEL

Introduction

Joel's prophecy was prompted by a great locust plague. The people were faced with the most devastating locust plague the land had ever known. Wave after wave of these destroying pests had swept down on them. It was followed by a severe drought to complete the picture of devastation and ruin. It was a tragic hour.

In the city of Jerusalem, in 1915, there occurred a locust plague that was a huge tragedy. In his book, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, George Robinson describes this plague.

A most vivid description of it by John D. Whiting appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* for December, 1915. Mr. Whiting describes the plague as beginning late in February of that year, extending over all Palestine and Syria from the borders of Egypt to the Taurus mountains. Similar plagues had been known to take place in Jerusalem in 1845, and in 1865 (the year the Arabs called the year of the locust, 1892, 1899, 1904). Over and over again, locusts had come to this land. The following are some of the accompanying phenomena in 1915. A loud noise was heard before the locusts were seen, produced by the flapping of thousands of locust wings and resembling the distant rumble of waves (cf. Rev. 9:9). The sun was suddenly darkened. Showers of their excrement fell thick and fast, resembling those of mice. Their elevation above the earth was at times hundreds of

feet; at other times they flew quite low, detached numbers alighting. "In Jerusalem, at least," Mr. Whiting says, "they invariably came from the northeast, going towards the southwest. That establishes the accuracy of Joel's account in chapter 2:20." Tons were captured and buried alive; many were thrown into cisterns, or into the Mediterranean Sea, and, when washed ashore, were collected and dried and used for fuel in Turkish baths. The government issued a proclamation in April, 1915, requiring every man from sixteen to sixty years of age to gather eleven pounds of locust eggs, daily, and deliver them to the officials. The storks, which the Arabs call "the father of good luck," were especially numerous over Palestine in 1915, and greedily devoured the innumerable host of the locust pests. Hens gorged themselves upon them.

Mr. Aaronsohn, another witness of the plague in 1915, testifies that in less than two months after their first appearance, not only was every green leaf devoured, but the very bark was peeled from the trees, which stood out white and lifeless, like skeletons. The fields, he says, were stripped to the ground. Even Arab babies left by their mothers in the shade of some tree, had their faces devoured before their screams could be heard. The natives accepted the plague as a just judgment upon them because of their wickedness.

It was a calamity such as this, which Joel employed to call the husbandmen, the vine dressers, the priests, and the drunkards of his day to repentance. In his picture of their ravages he describes the beasts and lower animals as also suffering with men, and as standing pathetic in their mute appeal the dire calamity and their sufferings being an omen of

the dread “day of the Lord” which was about to come!¹

It was a tragic hour! That was the description of a locust plague. Before them, it would be as the Garden of Eden, and behind them as if a fire had burned. Men were desperate in their plight. They were ready to listen to God’s messenger as he spoke God’s divine will to them. It was a great hour for the prophet. Boldly, Joel faced the frightened people with the Lord’s call to repent. The book of Joel really began the preaching of the prophets to Israel.

The Date of the Book — c. 830 B.C.

Joel is dated by many scholars as very late with a date of 400 B.C. This study dates Joel early during the reign of Joash (cf. 2 Kings 12) when the king was under the control of a good counselor. That would place the date at 830 B.C. The following facts help determine that date for this book.

First, the enemies of Israel mentioned in the book of Joel are the Philistines, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, and the Edomites (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:10, 16-17). That does not fit well with 400 B.C. It does fit with the middle of the ninth century.

Second, there was no reference to Assyria which emerged about 760 B.C. That would fit either an early or late date.

Third, there was no reference to Babylon, which soon followed Assyria, but perished by 536 B.C. That would fit an early or late date.

Fourth, one of the main things that pointed to Joel being an early book rather than a late book was that Amos seemed to quote Joel. Amos 1:1-2, said:

*The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of
Tekoa—what he saw concerning Israel two years*

¹See George L. Robinson, The Twelve Minor Prophets (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1926) 33-35.

before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel. He said: 'The lion roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.'

Compare Amos 1:1-2 with Joel 3:16 when Joel said,

The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

They are the same, so Amos was probably quoting Joel. This seems to indicate that the book of Amos, written in 755 B.C. quoted the book of Joel, which was written about 830 B.C.

Fifth, the place assigned the book of Joel in the Hebrew Bible showed their belief in its early date. They did not arrange the Minor Prophets in absolutely correct chronological order, but they did group them as they believed they were written. I accept the date as being a little before the middle of the ninth century, about 830 B.C., in the early part of Joash's reign when he was still under the counsel of a good prophet.

The Outline of the Book

The Plague

The first point in the book of Joel was the prophet speaking of the locust plague, which he saw as a forerunner of the day of the Lord (cf. Joel 1:1-2:17). Later in the book Joel gave God's answer to the questions (cf. Joel 2:18ff), but at this point the prophet was preaching to the people about their problems. Joel 1:2-20 covers the devastation of the locust plague and a great drought.

Hear this you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers. (There were two generations there, the generation of the older men and the generation of their fathers.) Tell it to your children and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation (which totals another three generations) (Joel 1:2-4).

Altogether, there were five generations of time that had never seen this kind of judgment. Joel issued a call to repentance, as he called the drunkards and the drinkers of wine to wake up and wail. They would be wailing because they had no more wine (cf. Joel 1:5-14). The locusts would eat the grapes, and the grapes brought the wine. He described the locust as a nation, as an army that God called to march for Him. They had teeth like a lion and fangs like a lioness. They ate the vines. They ate the bark off the trees (cf. Joel 1:6-7). They left the trees and the vines white, as we read a moment ago from the description of the locust plague in 1915.

Joel prayed a beautiful prayer for mercy.

Alas, for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes—joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering. To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures (Joel 1:15-20).

The righteous prophet and the innocent animals were calling to God for mercy.

The Fast

This was a forced fast. They had nothing to eat because the locust had eaten all that they wanted. The locust plague created a fast that was a warning from God:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness (Joel 2:1-2a).

Then Joel talked about the locust plague. The day of Jehovah was not there yet, but the locust plague declared that it was coming, and it was near. He described the locust and said, “*Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come*” (Joel 2:2b). That was a Hebrew idiom to simply say that this was something that was unusual and unique. The fathers had not seen it. The grandfathers had not seen it. The children, grandchildren, and the great grandchildren would not see anything like this. It was a terrible judgment. Joel 2:3 says,

Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them. He correctly described the locusts: They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle (Joel 2:4-5).

The locust plague was a warning to the people. Joel said, “*The LORD thunders at the head of his army; . . . (Who was the commander of this army of locusts? Who was telling them where to go? Who was telling them what to attack? Who was telling them what to do? It was the Lord.) . . . his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. (The locust were obedient to God.) The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?*” (Joel 2:11). There was the call, the warning and the call to repentance.

The Day of the Lord

Joel discussed the day of the Lord in chapter two saying that it would be a day of blessing and terror. The prophet had preached and called upon the people to repent and to recognize in the locust plague the warning from God. God does use natural calamity. God spoke to the people, blessings were promised to Israel, and repentance is implied (cf. Joel 2:18-32). Joel said, “*Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people*” (Joel 2:18). He wanted them to know that if they repented perhaps God would change His mind and bless them rather than cursing them.

Israel received the temporal blessings that were listed in Joel 2:19-27. God says, “*The LORD will reply to them: . . . (He would reply to them because they had repented, prayed, and sought God’s will.) ‘I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations’*” (Joel 2:18). Joel did not have enough faith to beg for that. He just begged that God would give them enough grain and oil to offer a thank offering to God so that the priests could go in and represent them again, and by that there would be joy. He just wanted enough grain to give to God. God said, “Because you have sought Me and you have repented, I will give you more than you ever dreamed of. I will give you enough wine and oil to satisfy you fully, and never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.” It

would be as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:8, *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

The spiritual blessings were listed in Joel 2:28-32. He told them He would give them spiritual blessings. He would pour out His Spirit upon them, not upon a few, but upon them all. As proof that the Spirit had been poured out, sons and daughters would prophesy, old men would dream dreams, and servants and handmaids would prophesy. Everyone down to the slaves would receive the Spirit of God, and when judgment was to come, all who called upon the name of the Lord would escape. Deliverance would be found in Zion.

In chapter three, judgment came upon all the nations. All wrongs were avenged in Joel 3:1-3. Every wrong that had been done to God’s people would be avenged in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. All enemies were judged in verses 4 to 8 by the divine decree of God. God would glorify His people.

But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. ‘Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her. In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house and will water the valley of acacias. But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood. Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon.’ The LORD dwells in Zion! (Joel 3:16b-21).

How did Obadiah end? *“The kingdom will be the LORD’s”*

(Obadiah 21). How does Joel end? *“The Lord dwells in Zion”* (Joel 3:21).

The Teachings of the Book

Its Theme, Message, Comfort, and Permanent Lessons

The theme of Joel was “The day of the Lord is at hand.” He was close by, and He was coming in judgment. The message said that God used natural calamity to call for national repentance. God wanted Israel to repent, so He sent the locust plague to get them to do so. The comfort was that repentance would avert the judgment of God. The people did repent between Joel 2:17-18. God said, *“Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people”* (Joel 2:18). Judgment cannot come upon a people who repent. The permanent lessons that can be learned from this book are that judgment is inevitable, the attitude of the heart determines its destiny, and God delights in giving men His Spirit.

The Discussion of the Text

The Day of the Lord

The theme of the book of Joel, “The Day of the Lord,” will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. However, we will look briefly at it here. From the book of Joel, two things can be learned about the day of Jehovah: **one**, it was a day of judgment, and **two**, it was a day of salvation. Look at the judgment involved in the day of Jehovah in the following passages.

Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty (Joel 1:15). *Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming* (Joel 2:1). *The day of*

the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? (Joel 2:11). The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD (Joel 2:31). Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; and the earth and the sky will tremble (Joel 3:14-16a).

All of this would come upon the enemies of God.

The “Day of the Lord” was also a day of salvation.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:28-32).

Salvation came to those who called on God when God called on them. They would be delivered in Mount Zion.

God’s Use Of Natural Calamity

Joel 2:1-13 showed God’s use of natural calamity. He brought the locust plague as a mighty army. They marched through the land. They scaled the walls. They ate all the crops.

They took the joy away from the land: “‘*Even now,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*return to me with all your heart . . .*’ (The key is “*. . . with all your heart . . .*”), ‘*. . . with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments*’” (Joel 2:12-13a). That is a fabulous statement! It was possible for one to tear off his garments, put on sackcloth and throw ashes on his head when he was sorrowful, and his heart still be whole and not torn. However, God said to tear your heart not your garments. “Return,” He said. “Return to the Lord, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. He relents from sending calamity.” Who knows? God may turn, have pity and leave behind a blessing — grain offerings and drink offerings from the Lord your God. Why did God use natural calamities? He used them to call men to repentance.

The Goodness of God In the Midst of Judgment

God said,

. . . ‘ I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully. I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, . . . He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before . . . I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . ’ (Joel 2:19-25).

It normally takes seven years for a people to recover from a locust plague. God said, “I’m going to give back to you what the locusts destroyed.” God would, in His great providence, send rain at just the right time, bless the earth totally, and Israel would again be blessed.

The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit Upon All Flesh

One of the key lessons in the book of Joel is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh (cf. Joel 2:28-32). This was

the passage quoted by Peter in Acts 2:11-21 to explain the phenomenon that occurred on the day of Pentecost. God sent His Spirit, and Jesus commissioned His Spirit into the world.

In Acts 2:1-4, the apostles spoke in tongues, and the people were amazed. The people thought the apostles were drunk. Peter said, "Not at all. At least, not on wine. It is only the third hour of the day." He explained, "What has happened here is exactly what Joel said would happen. The Spirit has come. It has been poured out upon all flesh." Peter then promised that those who repented and were baptized would also receive the gift of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). That was God's promise in the book of Joel to those Jews, their children, and the Gentiles who were far off, even as many as the Lord our God would call unto Him (cf. Acts 2:41).

The book of Joel is a very modern book. Every time anyone is immersed into Christ, they receive the Spirit of God. The promise from the book of Joel was fulfilled over and over again. Joel said, "God did it. He poured out His Spirit upon all flesh." Joel's prophecy was fulfilled, and today, possessing the Spirit of God, I know that God has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh. If you believe that, then obey the gospel so the Spirit that was poured out can come to live within you also. God give you great peace in believing these things.

SPECIAL STUDY

“THE DAY OF THE LORD” AND “MOUNT ZION”

Introduction

This chapter covers a special study of two very important phrases used throughout the prophets. These two phrases that are of special interest in prophetic literature have been introduced in the book of Joel: “*The day of the LORD*” or “*The day of Jehovah*,” and “*Mount Zion*.” There is not a prophet who does not speak about “*Mount Zion*,” and very few prophets do not speak of “*The day of the LORD*.” For those reasons, it is important to study these two phrases separate from the study of the prophetic books.

“*The Day of the LORD*”

The first phrase is “*The day of the LORD*.” This expression originated in the ninth century. In the book of Joel, the theme of Joel’s prophecy was a locust plague. It was out of this locust plague that the language for the expression “*The day of the LORD*” came.

In George Robinson’s book, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, there is a description about a locust plague that occurred in Jerusalem in 1915. It tells about locust that darkened the sun when they flew over. As they flew over the city at night, the moon looked blood red if one looked up through their wings. Before the locust came, the land was as beautiful as the Garden

of Eden, but then the earth shook. After they flew over a section of land, the land was left as arid and parched as if it had been burned. Joel used all of this imagery as a forerunner to declare that “*The day of the LORD*” was coming. The language of “*The day of the LORD*,” as stated in the book of Joel, described not only the locust plague, but in exaggerated language described how “*The day of the LORD*” would be much more severe.

The purpose of this chapter on “*The day of the LORD*” will be to look at some passages from each one of the prophets that used this expression and try to see clearly what “*The day of the LORD*” or “*The day of Jehovah*” was really like.

Ninth Century Origin — The Book of Joel

The phrase “*The day of the LORD*” originated in the book of Joel during the ninth century B.C. Joel had just completed the description of the locust plague, and he said, “*Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; (Since the locust plague was past, the plague itself was not “the day of the LORD.”) it will come like destruction from the Almighty*” (Joel 1:15). The first description about the day of Jehovah or “*the day of the LORD*” was that it would be “*like destruction from the Almighty.*”

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. (The locust plague was already past, but the day of the LORD is coming.) It is close at hand — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come (Joel 2:1-2).

“*The day of the LORD*” would be a day of trembling, a day of darkness, a day of gloom, and a day of clouds that spread on

the mountain. The locusts had come and done their damage, but now the army of God, an army even greater than the locusts who had devoured the land would come; and it would take years for the land to recover. The day of the LORD was coming, and when that day came it would not be a day of partial judgment. It would be a day of total judgment.

Joel said, “. . . *The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?*” (Joel 2:11b). It would be a great and dreadful day, a day that could not be endured. It would be such a dreadful day of judgment and destruction that everything would be swept away before it. In the middle of the great passage about the outpouring of God’s Spirit that would bring salvation to all the people (cf. Joel 2:30-32), there was another description about “*the day of the LORD.*”

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness . . . (This was a figurative description of what happened when the locust plague came.) and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD (Joel 2:30).

God would give a warning. The locust plague was a warning of the great and dreadful “*day of the LORD*” that was coming:

And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:32).

“*The day of the LORD*” would be a great and dreadful day. For the ungodly it would be a day of destruction. For the righteous it would be a day of survival and redemption.

Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3:12-16).

“*The day of the LORD*” was a day of judgment for the wicked and refuge for the righteous. That day would be when God came to declare His judgment on the earth. This was the origin of the phrase “*the day of the LORD.*”

Eighth Century Usage

The eighth century usage of this expression was used in Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. In this study each prophet developed the figure more and more so that it was made clearer. As Zechariah and Malachi closed, the picture of “*the day of the LORD*” was very distinctive.

Amos pronounced a woe upon anyone who desired “*the day of the LORD*” to come.

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light — pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? (Amos 5:18-20).

It would be a dark day, but Amos also said that it would be an inescapable day. He pictured a person walking through the forest and confronting a lion; when the lion roared, he turned to run from the lion. As he ran, he ran into a bear; spinning around to get away from the bear, he ran to his house. He closed and bolted the door, believing that he had escaped. He put his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. A person can run, but he cannot hide from God. God was going to find everyone who hides from Him. It would be a day of darkness that no one could escape.

Hosea spoke of this day by saying,

The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac” (Hosea 9:7).

He said that it would be a day of punishment for Israel. It would be a day of reckoning because their sins were so great. Hosea added to what had already been inferred. The reason for this day and the reason for this judgment was the wickedness of the people.

Isaiah had more to say about “*the day of the LORD*” than anyone else in the Old Testament. He said, “*The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled), . . .*” (Isaiah 2:12). He said that it would be a day of humbling for the proud and lofty of Israel who had exalted themselves.

What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised (Isaiah 10:3-4).

Isaiah said it would be impossible to flee. Even money would not bring deliverance. Alliances with the wicked would not help. Then he spoke of Babylon:

An oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw: . . . I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath—those who rejoice in my triumph. . . .Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. . . .Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger (Isaiah 13:1-13).

Not only was Israel going to face “*the day of the LORD*,” but all of the nations would face it as well. Babylon, who surely thought they would escape any judgment by any force, had not thought about the fact that they would contend with God and face this day along with all the other nations.

Isaiah said,

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains. Elam takes up the quiver . . . (Isaiah 22:5-6).

In the next thirteen verses, he said the judgment that was coming upon Jerusalem would be one of tumult, trampling, and terror.

Isaiah spoke of the small nation of Edom to the south that had considered itself large in the book of Obadiah. He spoke of judgment upon that nation in the figure of “*the day of the LORD*” by saying, “*For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion’s cause. Edom’s streams*

will be turned into pitch, . . .” (Isaiah 34:8-9a). He continued to discuss the destruction of Edom, but notice in this verse that he made it very plain that not only would it be a day of vengeance for Israel but also a day of retribution for Edom because of their sin.

Later in the book, Isaiah talked about Edom being judged. Edom would finally get what it deserved because of the way it had treated its brother, Judah. (This was also a lesson in Obadiah.)

Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.' Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come (Isaiah 63:1-4).

It would be a day of vengeance toward Edom, but for Israel it would be a day of redemption. “*The day of the LORD*” came because of sin and for the purpose of righteousness.

Seventh Century Usage

Jeremiah was the first prophet in the seventh century to use this phrase: “*How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it*” (Jeremiah 30:7). It would be a day of terror and trouble from which the people of God would barely manage to escape.

Jeremiah also presented the punishment and destruction of Babylon. He said:

Kill all her young bulls; let them go down to the slaughter! Woe to them! For their day has come, the time for them to be punished” (Jeremiah 50:27). ‘See, I am against you, O arrogant one,’ declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty, ‘for your day has come, the time for you to be punished’ (Jeremiah 50:31). ‘I will send foreigners to Babylon to winnow her and to devastate her land; they will oppose her on every side in the day of her disaster’ (Jeremiah 51:2). ‘The day of the LORD,’ in reality, is vengeance coming from the LORD.

Jeremiah also discussed God’s coming judgment upon Egypt. Pharaoh Neco had pursued his enemies all the way to the Euphrates River, but it was there that “*the day of the LORD*” would find him. Vengeance and sacrifice would finally come upon Egypt.

But that day belongs to the Lord, the LORD Almighty – a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied, till it has quenched its thirst with blood. For the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will offer sacrifice in the land of the north by the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:10).

“*The day of the LORD*” was also discussed by the seventh century prophet Zephaniah. He said, “‘*Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited*’” (Zephaniah 1:7). “*The day of the LORD*” was coming upon the nation of Judah, and Judah would be destroyed by the power of God: “‘*On that day,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills*’” (Zephaniah 1:10).

‘The great day of the LORD is near — near and

coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men' (Zephaniah 1:14-17a).

“*The day of the LORD*” would be a day of judgment upon all the enemies of God because of the wickedness that had come upon the land.

Exilic Usage

Ezekiel was the prophet who used this phrase during the time of exile for Israel. The end had come and was discussed in Ezekiel 7:2, 3, and 5. The time had come. It was not going to be delayed. It was going to be a day of recompense, disaster, and the sword. Its extent would cover the entire land. When this great “*day of the LORD*” came, and the city of Jerusalem fell, they would learn “. . . *I am the LORD*” (Ezekiel 7:4, 9, and 27). It would be the LORD’s day not Babylon’s day. In Ezekiel 30 it was a day of doom and sword upon Egypt as well. God inflicted His punishment on the Egyptians and Israelites alike.

Post-Exilic Usage

During the post-exilic age Zechariah prophesied that “*the day of the LORD*” was going to come upon the city of Jerusalem (cf. Zechariah 14:1-21). It would be a day of plunder (cf. Zechariah 14:1-2), deliverance (cf. Zechariah 14:3, 7), sustenance (cf. Zechariah 14:6), unity (cf. Zechariah 14:9), and holiness (cf. Zechariah 14:20-21).

Malachi described “*the day of the LORD*” as a day of destruction and purification that was going to come upon the

Jewish remnant (cf. Malachi 3:2-3). It was described as the furnace of God and a burning fire for all the arrogant evil-doers. It would be a day of healing, joy, and victory for the righteous (cf. Malachi 4:6).

What was “*the day of the LORD*”? In every case, whether it be against Israel, Judah, Babylon, Egypt, Edom, or the remnant of Israel, it was a day of destruction for the wicked and a day of salvation for the righteous. The main focus was that it really would be the day that God showed He had had His fill with a wicked nation and must destroy it.

The Description of “*Mount Zion*”

The second part of this study deals with another prevalent subject in the Bible — “*Mount Zion*.”

The Development Of “*Mount Zion*”

“*Mount Zion*” started as a Jebusite fortress.

The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, ‘You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.’ They thought, ‘David cannot get in here.’ Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David (2 Samuel 5:6-7).

In this passage “*Zion*” was called a fortress. However, later it was also called “*The City of David*” (cf. 2 Samuel 5:7b, 6:12). It was David’s home where the Lord’s king lived. God said, “*I have installed my King on Zion, my Holy Hill*” (Psalm 2:6).

It is more than David’s home now. It is God’s Holy Hill. God said, “*For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: This is my resting place for ever and ever;. . .*” (Psalm 132:13-14a). “*Zion*” was called, “. . . *the city of the Great King*” (Psalm 48:2b). No matter what it is called —

Jebusite fortress, David's home, Holy Hill, or the City of the Great King, the point is that God said, "I will dwell there."

Prophetic Use Of "Mount Zion"

Psalm 2:6 and 9 said that God would set His King upon the "*Holy Hill of Zion.*" He would possess the nations and rule the people with a rod of iron. This was quoted in Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15, and Hebrews 1:8 with each scripture referring to Jesus. The King **is** installed. Jesus **is** on His throne. The King possesses all the nations. Jesus **is** ruling over all nations. He **is** ruling them with a rod of iron. In Psalm 110:2-4 David said the Lord would rule over His enemies, rule them with a scepter, and be a priest forever. This passage was quoted five times in the book of Hebrews (cf. Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 17, 21). Every time it is used it applies to Christ.

Isaiah said, "*The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*" (Isaiah 2:3b). Jesus said that the gospel message must start from the city of Jerusalem, and then proceed to all the nations in order to fulfill "*all that the prophets have said*" (cf. Luke 24:44-49). Zechariah said that God would be jealous for "*Zion,*" would dwell in Jerusalem, and that he would give peace, prosperity, and salvation there (cf. Zechariah 8:1). All of this was fulfilled in the great passages concerning the church.

Fulfillment in the Church

In Hebrews 12 those passages in the Old Testament about "*Zion*" were fulfilled in the New Testament kingdom, the church of the living God.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear

what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.' The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear' (Hebrews 12:18-21).

The mountain that Christians come to is not Mount Sinai, where the law was given, but it is “*Mount Zion*.” All of the passages of the Old Testament that spoke of “*Zion*” are now being fulfilled: Psalm 2, 110, Isaiah 2, and Zechariah 8. God said, “*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God . . .*” (Hebrews 12:22a).

What is “*Mount Zion*”? The Hebrew writer said that it was the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Who are the inhabitants of “*Mount Zion*”? They are the thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. God’s children whose names are written in heaven have come to the church of the firstborn. They have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of righteous men who have been made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. They have come to the place where God dwells. Who are those who live in “*Zion*”? “*Mount Zion*” is the kingdom of God! It is the church of God. The people who live in “*Zion*” are the children of God.

“*Mount Zion’s*” resource is the sprinkled blood that speaks better than the blood of Abel. What is its permanence? All others will pass away and be shaken, but Hebrews 12:28 said,

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’

Today “*Mount Zion*” is the unshakable permanent kingdom of God which Christians have received. What is the mission of “*Zion’s*” inhabitants? Their mission is to worship God. Their

commission is to hold Him in reverence. Their mission is to hold God in awe and serve Him, because to not serve Him will result in being consumed by His fire. This verse blends together both “*the day of the LORD*” and “*Mount Zion*” (cf. Hebrews 12:28).

There is an escape from “*the day of the LORD*” on “*Mount Zion*.” This was said over and over again in the Old Testament. But only on “*Mount Zion*” is there refuge from the consuming fire of God. God is a fierce judge of His enemies. God is a sufficient Savior of His righteous ones. But only on “*Mount Zion*” can we find the security, safety, and the comfort that God offers. It is on “*Mount Zion*” that Christians can worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. It is from “*Mount Zion*” that the word is to go forth to all the world. Dwell on “*Zion*,” worship God, and preach His word. In doing so escape His judgment to come and find true peace.

JONAH

The book of Jonah is not a book of prophecy but rather an account of the prophet's mission to announce the speedy destruction of Nineveh. The book is concerned with Jonah's own personal feelings of the past history in relation to his mission rather than his preaching. Jonah could be called the reluctant prophet, because he preached when he really did not want to.

Introduction

Jonah prophesied at a time of crisis in the histories of both Assyria and Israel. Assyria was in a depression, and Israel was experiencing glory. God's promise to Israel was fulfilled during the time of Jeroboam in 2 Kings 14:25 because he restored Israel's borders from the entrance to Hamath to the Sea of Arabah. Jeroboam restored Israel to the promised limits that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 15, but Israel did not repent after Jonah's preaching or the preaching of other prophets (cf. 2 Kings 17). The result was that Israel rushed headlong into deep and total ruin.

God's threat against Nineveh, that they would be destroyed in forty days, was announced by Jonah, the same prophet who told Israel about its glory. The threat was prophesied during a time of temporary decline in Assyria. Jonah's preaching caused Nineveh to repent so God spared the city and restored the power of the great Assyrian empire. It is rather odd that Nineveh would eventually be used by God to destroy Israel, and God would be completely justified in doing so.

The Date of the Book – c. 800 -780 B.C.

Jonah wrote his book sometime between 800 and 780 B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam II. Jeroboam ruled between 800 and 755 B.C., and 2 Kings 14:25 states that Jonah was Jeroboam's prophet.

In his book, *Hours with the Bible*, Cunningham Geikie said that from 800 B.C. until Tiglath-Pileser's accession to the throne in 745 B.C., Assyria was struggling with internal strife. That internal strife resulted in a period of revolt by the provinces that it ruled. It was a time when Assyria's dominion was not that strong. This fact of history establishes fairly well that the date of the book was between 800 and 780 B.C.

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Message and Comfort

The theme of the book Jonah is the willingness of God to save the heathen nations if they would repent. The message is that the Lord is a universal God — the God of all of the Earth. There are two things that this book said to the people who read it the first time. **One**, God was willing to save Assyria or any other heathen nation when they repented. **Two**, the book of Jonah proved that God was not just the God of Israel. He was not just a local or regional God. He was the God of the whole earth. The comfort this book gave said that God would be gracious to all who repented. He would make it possible for them to repent even if He had to bring tragedy into their lives as He did the life of Jonah.

Its Permanent Lessons

Number one, no one can run away from God.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on

the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:7-11).

Jonah needed to know what David knew when he wrote this psalm. David said, “If I go up to heaven, He is there. If I make my bed in Sheol, He is there. If I take the wings of the morning or dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, He will find me there. His right hand will still hold me and guide me. I cannot run from God. If I am faithful to God and love Him, that is a great comfort, but if I am not faithful to God, then that is no comfort at all.”

Number two, it is possible to hate what God hates without loving what He loves. God hated the wickedness of Nineveh, and so did Jonah. God loved the souls of the people in Nineveh, and Jonah did not. He hated their wickedness, but he did not love the souls of his enemies.

The Outline of the Book

The book of Jonah is easily divided into an outline form according to the chapter divisions.

Jonah’s Call And Flight To Tarshish.

Chapter one: “Jonah running away from God.” The key word in this chapter is disobedience. God told Jonah to go and cry out against the wickedness of the city of Nineveh. Instead he ran from the task that God had given him. Jonah 1:1-2 was God’s charge to go preach. Jonah 1:3 was Jonah’s rebellion. He found a ship that was headed in the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go. God loved Jonah so He sent a storm upon the sea, and the ship was almost destroyed. The sailors were in great confusion. They prayed to their gods and threw their cargo over the side to try to satisfy the gods’ anger, but nothing worked. Finally, at Jonah’s insistence, they threw him into the water. The sea calmed and the sailors were delivered.

Jonah's Miraculous Deliverance

Chapter two: "Jonah running to God." Jonah's miraculous deliverance after he ran away from God in disobedience came when he was swallowed by a great fish. From the fish's belly he ran to God in repentance. His prayer was recorded in Jonah 2:1-9. God delivered Jonah (cf. Jonah 2:10).

Jonah's Preaching In The City Of Nineveh

Chapter three: "Jonah running with God." Jonah finally followed God's will, at least in his outward obedience. His heart was not in it, but at least he reluctantly did what God told him to do. The repentant prophet's message was that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed (cf. Jonah 3:1-4). The entire population of this sinful city, including the king, repented because of Jonah's message (cf. Jonah 3:5-10). God turned away from the evil that He said He would do to them.

Jonah's Complaint To God

Chapter four: "Running Ahead of God." Jonah ran away from God, ran to God, ran with God and then he ran ahead of God. The key word is bigotry or prejudice. Jonah was angry because God saved Assyria (cf. Jonah 4:1-5). The prophet was joyful because he had both a booth and a vine to shade him from the heat. When the vine was destroyed, he became angry again. The LORD rebuked Jonah for being angry and told him that His (God's) concern was that Nineveh repent so that the people could be saved.

The Discussion of the Text

The whole book of Jonah must be taught at one time to get the message that God wants to convey. Jonah is an unusual and different book of prophecy because there are only eight words of preaching in the entire book: ". . . *Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned*" (Jonah 3:4b). His sermon was probably longer

than that, but that is all that is recorded in this book. The rest of the book is about Jonah's experiences in a biographical lesson as Jonah recorded his own history.

Jonah's Disobedience

Jonah was totally disobedient when he ran away from God:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me'. . . . But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. (That is on the west side of Spain.) He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD (Jonah 1:1-3).

Jonah did not run to Tarshish because he believed that God only lived in Israel. He was running from the LORD in the sense that he was running from the LORD's assignment. The LORD told him what to do, but he did not want to do it. Jonah refused to go and ran away from the assignment that God had given him.

God's assignment was for Jonah to go to Nineveh which was northeast of where he was, but instead he headed for Tarshish which was due west. He was going as far away from the assignment that God wanted him to do as he could by running in the opposite direction. Why did Jonah not go to Nineveh? It was not because he was fearful of the people of Nineveh. Jonah said that he did not go because he knew that if he went, they would hear his message, they would repent, and God would save them (cf. Jonah 4:1-3). Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to be saved. He was a narrow-minded patriot. He loved his country more than he loved the souls of the people of Nineveh.

When Jonah was on the ship, the LORD sent such a great wind and violent storm that the ship was threatening to break apart (cf. Jonah 1:4 ff.). God is the God of nature. He said to a storm,

“Go over there,” and the storm went. The sailors were afraid and each one prayed to his god (cf. Jonah 1:5). They even threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship, hoping they would not crash on the rocks. However, Jonah was down in the hold of the ship fast asleep because he believed he had escaped the assignment God had given him. This was not like Jesus being able to sleep during the storm. Jesus knew He was safe in the arms of God (cf. Matthew 8:18-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25).

However, God was not going to allow his prophet to run from his assignment. He sent the storm to tell Jonah, “I am still here.” The captain woke Jonah and asked him to pray to his god.

Then the sailors said to each other, ‘Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.’ They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. . . . ‘Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?’ (Jonah answers them.) . . . ‘I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land’ (Jonah 1:7-9).

These pagans were terrified because the sea was against them, the land threatened them and this person served the God who had made the sea and the land. They said, “. . . ‘What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?’” (Jonah 1:11). To Jonah’s credit, he was the only preacher on record who ever said, “I am the trouble. If you will get rid of me, the trouble will go away” (cf. Jonah 1:12). He said, “*Pick me up and throw me into the sea . . . , and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you*” (Jonah 1:12). These sailors were good men, and they did not want to throw Jonah overboard. They put the oars into the water and rowed even harder to get back to land, but they could not do it. So they prayed to the LORD, saying, “. . . ‘O LORD, please do not let us die for taking

this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased'” (Jonah 1:14). They picked Jonah up, threw him overboard, and immediately, the storm stopped. Seeing this happen, they offered sacrifices and made vows to God (cf. Jonah 1:16).

God had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Sometimes this fish gives people problems, because they cannot find a fish that can hold a man for three days and three nights. This does not matter. This text said, “*God prepared a great fish*” (Jonah 1:17 KJV). It is not known if the fish already existed, and God said, “Go over there and swallow Jonah,” or if He created the fish so that he was big enough to swallow Jonah. It does not make any difference because the lesson was that God delivered Jonah even though Jonah was still a reluctant and disobedient prophet.

Jonah's Repentance

After three days and three nights in that fish's belly, Jonah repented (Matthew 12:38-40). He was in deep despair. The text says,

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: 'In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help' (Jonah 12:1-2).

God wants His children to pray before they get into distress, but He wants them to pray when they are in distress as well. In deep despair and terrible depression, Jonah cried out to God, and God heard him. Jonah said “I am in the depths of the sea. I have been banished from God's sight. The earth has imprisoned me forever. I am where I have no hope of deliverance.” But he was delivered. Jonah said, “God, you answered me. You listened to my prayer. I will look again toward your holy temple. You have brought my life up out of the pit.”

Jonah's deep despair brought about his joyous, glorious

deliverance. But having been delivered, what was he going to do? He said,

When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD (Jonah 2:7-9).

Jonah was joyful in the deliverance that he believed God would give him. God commanded the storm to toss the ship about. He commanded the fish to swallow Jonah. He commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land. God is the God who made the land and the sea. He controls both the land and the sea and all creation. God issued the commands and everything obeyed.

The Prophet's Mission

Jonah's mission to the people of Nineveh was to deliver the message God had given him: *"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you'"* (Jonah 3:1-2). The secret of all successful teaching and preaching is to teach what God commands: *"Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh"* (Jonah 3:3a).

Nineveh was a very important city. When Jonah arrived in the city it took at least three days just to walk through it: *"On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed, 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned'"* (Jonah 3:4). This was probably not his entire message, but it was the main point: "You have forty days, and then comes the end."

Notice the response of sorrowful repentance from the people and the king. The Ninevites believed God, declared a fast, and put on sackcloth. The news of this reached the king. He rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth, and proclaimed:

. . . 'Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence' (Jonah 3:7b-8).

They believed, they fasted, they put on sackcloth, they called on God, and they turned from evil. A one word description of all that they did would be repentance. Repentance started at the top and continued all the way to the bottom.

Notice what happened when they repented: “*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them destruction he had threatened*” (Jonah 3:10). Note that this prophecy was conditional. They had forty days to repent. Once they repented, Nineveh existed for another two hundred years.

The Prophet's Bigotry

What was the prophet's response to the people's repentance? God's response was salvation, but Jonah's response to God's actions was anger:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, 'O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity' (Jonah 4:1-2; cf. Joel 2:13).

Jonah was angry because God showed love toward the city of Nineveh. He was mad enough to die over the fact that God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, and quick to relent of the evil that He said he would do. The reason for Jonah's anger was simple. Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh,

but God wanted to save Nineveh. Jonah represented the type of person to whom his nation and his situation were more important than the salvation of the world.

God asked Jonah this question: “. . . *‘Have you any right to be angry?’*” (Jonah 4:4). God did not wait for an answer, and Jonah did not offer one. Instead, Jonah went outside the city and built a shelter. It was hot around the city of Nineveh, but Jonah wanted to wait and see how God was going to react to Nineveh’s repentance: “*Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city*” (Jonah 4:5). He was so mad that he wanted to stay until he saw Nineveh destroyed. He was pleased with the shade that this shelter offered him. But God wanted him to learn a lesson:

Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine (Jonah 4:6).

Jonah built himself a shelter and enjoyed the shade that it provided. With all the heat in the noonday sun bouncing off the sand, Jonah’s shelter would have still been like an oven, so God provided a beautiful gourd-like tree over him with a lot of moisture so that Jonah could be cooled in the hot desert sun of Assyria. Jonah was very happy about the vine. God saw how happy Jonah was with this gourd that provided him comfort, so God took action in order to teach Jonah a lesson: “*But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered*” (Jonah 4:7). Jonah was so angry that he said, “. . . *‘It would be better for me to die than to live’*” (Jonah 4:8b). So God asked “. . . *‘Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?’ ‘I do,’ he said. ‘I am angry enough to die’*” (Jonah 4:9). The source of his anger was because his precious gourd tree, that he did not plant and did not work for, but provided him with shade, had been

destroyed. This action by God teaches the reason this book was written.

It was good that Jonah loved the Lord enough to write about his own selfishness. Jonah may have repented from his selfishness, but the text does not say. Jonah did try to defend his attitude. He said, “I’ve got a right to be mad. I’m mad enough to die.” The text says, “*But the Lord said, ‘You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight’*” (Jonah 4:10). God was telling Jonah, “You’re angry. You’re concerned about this gourd because it sheltered you, because it served and pleased you.” God continued:

‘But Nineveh (In contrast to this gourd that came up in one day and died the next day.) has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left (that would be innocent children), and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?’ (Jonah 4:11).

God was saying, “Jonah, you are concerned about this gourd, but I am concerned about this city. You did not work for that gourd tree, but I worked for this city. You did not create that gourd tree, but I created this city. You did not cause that gourd tree to grow, but I caused this city to grow. I was concerned about Nineveh with its hundred and twenty thousand babies and all the animals that were innocent. I was concerned about these people.”

God’s lesson is simple — souls are more important than gourds. This is an important lesson because today people are so concerned about physical things that sometimes they forget the fact that God is concerned about spiritual things. He said, “. . . ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’” (Mark 16:15). He did not say, “Go build big buildings.” He did not say, “Go build fellowship halls.” He did not say, “Go build your own house.” He did not say, “Go make money.” He said,

“Go make disciples. Go preach the gospel to every creature.”

Do people today still believe in a localized God? That would be a good thing to discuss. Was there any basis for Jonah feeling toward Nineveh the way he did? Of course there was. Nineveh had brought judgment upon Israel before, and Nineveh would bring judgment upon them in the future.

At this point in the study, it is not important to worry about how Jesus used the example of Jonah. And it is not necessary to decide whether or not Israel was God’s chosen people. It is important to know that God is concerned about all souls. He loves every soul. Does today’s church love the souls of all men? Is the church so much a part of the world that they are more involved in the physical matters of their own peace, joy, and comfort? Is today’s church touched by the infinitely greater need of the souls of men throughout the world? Jesus became a man because he was concerned about the affairs of men.

The Holy Spirit inspired this book because God was concerned. Children of God need to imitate Jesus. They need to leave behind their own comforts and let God take care of them. He has promised that He will. They need to seek first the kingdom so that to them the most important thing is not that which benefits their own pleasure but that which benefits God and His pleasure. An important lesson to learn is that one soul is more valuable than all the world’s pleasure: “*What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self*” (Luke 9:25, cf. Mark 8:36). Souls are more important than gourds. That is the lesson of the book of Jonah. Believe that and have the peace that comes from believing.

AMOS (Part 1)

Introduction

Amos was the first of the eighth century prophets. The eighth century before Christ was a very interesting period of time. In Israel Jeroboam II had extended his borders back to the promised limits of the entrance of Hamath. Uzziah in the south had extended his borders all the way to the River of Egypt. Once again the people of God possessed all of the land that had been promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15. They were very rich at this time, both in the north and in the south. It was a period of unparalleled prosperity. But as so often happens, their riches had driven them to try to do everything they could to satisfy themselves and their selfish desires. It was a time when they had all of the military might they needed, all the money they needed, and all of the time they needed to indulge themselves. They began to indulge themselves in all kinds of sexual immorality and social oppression of the poor. The rich had one purpose — to become richer and have every single desire satisfied. They were willing to work all kinds of hours just to have the things they wanted. If there ever was a time like today, it was the eighth century B.C.

Amos, The Man

Amos was called to cry out against such things. He was well qualified for the job because he was a stern, fearless, self-contained man of granite. He possessed a powerful, orderly mind and a vivid imagination. For all of these reasons, he is one of the most arresting figures that ever walked in Hebrew history.

Amos was reared on the edge of the Judean desert twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He called himself one of the shepherds of Tekoa (cf. Amos 1:1). He tended the kind of sheep that climbed the mountain slopes. He was not the kind of shepherd who could lie down every day in a calm valley and watch his sheep as they fed. He had to find his sheep on the mountain slopes in order to take care of them. He was a rustic individual. He would be a natural enemy of urban immorality since he had lived close to nature; he did not even like the city. His occupation of being a shepherd of sheep that had the finest wool known in that area of the world would have carried him to the wool markets of the northern cities of Israel. There he would have become aware of the life and religion of the people and how corrupt both of them were.

Like John the Baptist, who would spend most of his years in that very same wilderness, Amos also developed into a religious reformer. He was supremely concerned for the rights of God and for justice among the oppressed people. Amos said that he had no special professional or formal preparation to preach. He was not a prophet by training or a prophet's son through inheritance. He was educated simply by having to stay alert to any danger or trouble. He did not belong to any established guild or union of preachers (cf. Amos 7:14).

God called Amos for one special mission (cf. Amos 7:14-15). That mission was to preach the word that God had given him. The message was that Jeroboam's house would fall, and Israel would be led captive from their land. In the lonely wilderness where he was raised, the shadow of God fell on his soul, and he became aware of God's coming judgments. He was forced to lift up his prophetic voice pronouncing woes over his people. He was called to go to Bethel where Jeroboam had a palace and a church. Under the shadow of the royal palace in the king's own religious sanctuary, he lifted up his voice in a vigorous and impassioned cry for justice. There may not have been any prophet who was better prepared for this mission than

Amos. His preparation had been in loneliness, in solitude, and in poverty, so he was not interested in the pursuit of riches as was found in the city of Bethel and in the nation of Israel. He was a Judean prophet preaching in Israel. He was a man from the south preaching in the north. He spoke with a southern dialect in the northern nation. When he entered the city of Bethel, he entered in his shepherd's garb because he put on no pretense. He smelled like sheep rather than the perfume that pervaded the city of Bethel. He spoke of the one God in a nation where the people worshiped many gods.

The Date of the Book

During the Reign of Jeroboam II of Israel

During the Reign of Uzziah of Judah

Amos prophesied in the middle of the eighth century, which places the date of his book about 755 B.C. Amos said that it was two years before the earth shook (cf. Amos 1:1). This was not an earthquake as it is normally translated. It is a matter of historical record that in the middle of the eighth century the planets Mars and Venus came very close to each other which shook almost the entire universe. It did shake the entire earth. This dates Amos historically in the middle of the eighth century. Amos can also be dated by the reigning times of the kings in the nations of Israel and Judah (cf. Amos 1:1). He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel who reigned from 783 B.C. to about 743 B.C. This was also during the reign of Uzziah in Judah who reigned from about 779 B.C. to 740 B.C.

Written After Obadiah and Joel

Amos was written after the book of Obadiah because he prophesied after Edom acted in an un-brotherly fashion against their brethren (cf. Amos 1:11-12 with Obadiah 10:14). Amos was also written after the book of Joel because he quotes from Joel (cf. Amos 1:2 with Joel 3:16).

Written During a Time of Great Prosperity and Two Threatening Perils – Temptations and Idolatry

Amos wrote during a time of great prosperity, politically and financially. He talked about this prosperity and wrote about the great apostasy from God by Israel. Amos was written (as was Hosea) during a time when there were two perils threatening the nation's existence. Both perils had the potential to lead the nation into idolatry and, therefore, into captivity (cf. Deuteronomy 28, 29, and 30).

The first peril was the moral and religious corruption that existed inside the nation. Israel had come to the point that there were no righteous judges to promote justice. The judges were oppressing the poor. This problem with the judges, corruption involving idolatry and indifference, and the lack of concern for God resulted in a wrong concept of God. It is amazing how often Israel's sin is based on what they think about God. Any nation's concept of "the Eternal" affects their lives in ways they do not even understand. If someone believes that God is eternal, He is watching, and He is interested in them, then their whole life is built around that belief. If the people of a nation believes that their god is made of wood and stone, then those people begin to think of themselves as nothing more than animals. They begin to believe that their god is not interested, does not care, or does not love them because they are just objects to satisfy his desires. Nations need to be careful what they think about God.

The second peril was the political threat based on the success of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were the people that Jonah's preaching had saved. They were becoming worldly, powerful, militarily strong, and a threat to Israel's existence.

What was Amos' answer to the danger of the moral and the religious corruption of Israel and the threat from the Assyrians? He stressed the spiritual character of God. He talked about God's nature. He said God was holy, righteous, pure, and loving. Although Amos did not emphasize this as much as Hosea, he spoke of the care and the love of God for Israel, even though they

did not love Him. In response to the political might of the Assyrian empire, Amos emphasized the universality of God's rule. It may have appeared as if Assyria was in control of what happened in this world, but the Assyrians were wrong if they believed that. Jonah and Joel had already said that God was in control. Then Amos said the same thing. Every prophet of God gave the message that God was in control. It may not look like it. It may be hard to believe. God is in ultimate control of what happens in this world. God is involved in the history of mankind.

The Outline of the Book

Judgments Against the Nations

Amos began by discussing those who surrounded Israel rather than discussing Israel's fall. This was very wise and tactful because Amos was a stranger in a foreign land. He was a worshiper of the one God in a temple that worshiped other gods. He drew a circle of judgment around Israel's enemies, and Israel agreed that there should be judgment upon these nations because they were their enemies. Then, when he had them nodding their heads in agreement, he drove the point into their heart by saying, "You are going to be judged, too."

First, Amos announced judgment upon Damascus, the capitol of Syria, which was located northeast of Israel.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Damascus, even for four, [The idea in the phrase "for three sins . . . even four" is that three sins fill up the cup, and four sins make it overflow. Amos used this phrase over and over.] I will not turn back my wrath. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth' (Amos 1:3).

God did not judge Damascus for waging war but for the cruelties carried out in war. It is the right of a nation to defend its

borders, but the way Damascus did it was cruel.

Second, Amos judged the city of Gaza in the country of Philistia, which was located due west of Israel, for the offense of slave trafficking (cf. Amos 1:6-8).

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom' (Amos 1:6).

Gaza was judged for treating people as objects.

Third, Amos judged Tyre in the country of Phoenicia (located northwest of Israel).

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood. I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses' (Amos 1:9-10).

Tyre was involved in the slavery of Israelites, and they delivered up their "brothers." When Solomon built the temple, he made an agreement with Hiram, the king of Tyre, that they would be brothers throughout all time. Tyre was failing to keep the covenant they had made so they were going to be judged.

Fourth, Amos declared judgment on Edom, a nation to the south.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah' (Amos 1:11-12).

This was also the message of the book of Obadiah. Edom was being judged for the uncompromising and determined hatred of their brothers from Israel. They failed to keep the covenant of brotherhood just as Tyre had.

Fifth, Ammon, a country located to the east of Israel was also judged.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders. I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day. Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together,' says the LORD (Amos 1:13-15).

Ammon was judged for intense cruelty during war. They did not want their enemies to survive, so they not only killed the men, they killed the babies in the wombs of the women as well.

Sixth, Amos judged Moab to the east of Israel.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom's king, I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him' (Amos 2:1-3).

This judgment was for a dead king, killed in a cruel fashion during war. Amos judged all of the Gentile nations that surrounded Israel in all directions. Then Amos announced judgment against Israel's stiff-necked brother, Judah, for religious apostasy.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem' (Amos 2:4-5).

Amos announced a judgment against everyone that Israel hated. He judged all of the Gentiles and also Judah because of their religious corruption. Then he brought the same announcement to Israel (cf. Amos 2:7-16).

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines' (Amos 2: 6-8).

After this, Israel did not like this prophet Amos. At first the people of Israel may have thought well of him because he judged all their enemies. Once he said, "You, too, will be judged. The eye of God is upon you," Israel was no longer happy with his prophecy. Judgment was coming upon Israel because of their social and religious corruptions.

Israel's Crimes and Condemnation

God had chosen Israel and favored them as a nation. God had given them so much, and they should have responded with obedience and love. God said: "‘You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your

sins” (Amos 3:2). This was only one of Israel’s crimes. The Lord warned the women about pressuring the men because they wanted the good things of life. They wanted houses and wine. They wanted to be entertained. They oppressed the poor and still demanded more for themselves (cf. Amos 4:1-5).

The Lord said that Israel had not paid attention to His past warnings; therefore, judgment would come (cf. Amos 4:6-13). The judgments in the past that God had brought upon Israel were intended to warn them of the wickedness in which they were involving themselves. This time Israel’s judgment would be that the nation would be overthrown (cf. Amos 5, 6). Judgment had to come upon Israel because they had forsaken the covenant, oppressed the poor, and bowed down to other gods.

Israel’s Future

First, Amos saw a vision of devouring locusts (cf. Amos 7:1-3). When he saw the great locust plague, the prophet pleaded to the Father: “Save Israel! How can they stand?” So God said, “All right, since you have prayed, I will save Israel.”

Second, he saw a consuming fire, which might have been a drought that pervaded the entire land (cf. Amos 7:4-6). Again the prophet said, “Lord, how is Israel going to stand? They cannot endure such a terrible fire.” So the Lord said, “Because you have prayed I will save Israel.”

Third, he saw a man standing by a wall with a plumb line in his hand ready to see if the wall was level. Unfortunately, Israel’s wall was no longer plumb or vertical. The plumb line, which represents the word of God, told Amos, “This wall must fall.” When a wall leans to a certain extent, one cannot prop it up because the only support that the wall had has been destroyed. In this case, the support of the wall was the strength of the Lord. It would fall. When Amos saw the word of God laid up beside Israel’s wall, he did not plead this time. He knew that Israel had to fall.

There was an interruption of Amos' words when Amaziah said, "Wait a minute! Stop this preaching! What do you mean Israel's wall will fall? This is the king's house. This is a royal sanctuary. How dare you say such things here!" (cf. Amos 7:10-17). Amos replied, "The Lord said this. I do not have any choice but to speak this message. Know one thing for sure. Israel is going to be led captive out of this land. The house of Jeroboam will die by the sword. You will eat unclean bread in an unclean land, and your wife will become another man's wife and your children will be killed by the sword. These things will happen because it is what the Lord has said will happen." Then Amos resumed the visions.

Fourth, there was the vision of the basket of summer fruit. Summer fruit is the last fruit. He saw a basket that said the fruit that Israel was then eating was the last fruit they would have. Judgment was coming (cf. Amos 8:1-10). Amos then interpreted his statements of the visions. He said, "God has told me that he is going to send a famine upon the land. It will not be a famine of bread nor of thirst for water, but it will be famine of the words of God. You will run here and there seeking the word of God, but you will not be able to find it. You need to listen to what I am saying. You need to listen to what my contemporary Hosea is saying, for that will be the last word of God to you" (cf. Amos 8:11-14).

Fifth, there was the vision of the smitten sanctuary or altar (cf. Amos 9:1-10). He saw the altar smitten and destroyed in Jeroboam's temple. He said, "Not only will God destroy you nationally, He is also going to destroy you religiously."

Sixth, Amos closed with a vision of hope, which was the restored tabernacle of David (cf. Amos 9:11-14). He saw David's temple or sanctuary restored. The book closes with a beautiful message about the Messiah's kingdom in Israel.

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme: God's Justice And Righteousness

God was a just God and a God of deep righteousness in the book of Amos. This was true all the way through the book, but particularly in Amos 5. God was a God of righteousness and justice, therefore, He demanded that others be like Him.

Its Message: God's Desire For Israel To Be Like Him

Its Comfort: There Will Be A Remnant

God wanted the people who claimed to follow Him to be like Him. What comfort did this book offer to Amos' people? What comfort does it offer to people today? After God sifted the nation with the judgment of the Assyrian empire, a remnant would ultimately be restored. When God sifted Israel's wheat, not the least kernel fell to the ground. There is the same comfort today. God knows the people that belong to Him, and He will save them from any trial that comes.

Its Permanent Lessons

First, learn that elaborate worship insults God when there is no heart to honor him (cf. Amos 5:21). Jesus said in Matthew 15:8-9 that if people try to worship God and their hearts are somewhere else, then God hates their worship.

Second, learn that privilege implies and involves responsibility. That lesson is particularly stated and taught throughout the book. Amos said, *"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins"* (Amos 3:2).

Third, learn the necessity of personal conviction. This is important not only in the kind of person the Christian becomes, but also in what he hears, sees, and does. When Amaziah told Amos not to preach, he said, "Look, I am not a preacher by trade, I am a shepherd. But God took me from following the sheep and He said, 'Go preach to My people, Israel.' Therefore,

hear what Jehovah says.”

Fourth, learn that ease, luxury and idleness lead to open sin. God said of Israel.

Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

That is a very important lesson.

Learn to be active in the labor of hands and heart. Be active toward God, and He will bring blessings. Remember ease, idleness and luxury lead to the open sins of social corruption and religious apostasy from God. Not only in the eighth century did this occur, but in all the centuries to follow even up to today. Believe in God, and there will be great peace.

AMOS (Part 2)

Review and Introduction

This chapter will be a continuation of the study of the book of Amos. The last chapter covered Amos' character. He was a stern, fearless, and faithful prophet of God. He was a rugged shepherd whose lifestyle had caused him to hate the sins of Israel. Israel's sins resulted in their turning away from God. He despised this sinful lifestyle so much that he became the same kind of religious reformer that Elijah had been before and that John the Baptist would be afterward.

Amos was not a professional prophet. He had been called to preach, and that made his message more impassioned than the professional preachers and prophets of that day. They challenged his attitude as he announced the downfall of Jeroboam's house and the entire nation of Israel. That made him even more impassioned to preach as they challenged his right to be there to speak for God.

Amos was written about 755 B.C. in the middle of the eighth century. The kings that he prophesied to were Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of the nation of Judah. The national condition that existed when he prophesied was that the borders had been extended to their promised limits. Uzziah had extended his border to the River of Egypt and Jeroboam to the entrance of Hamoth on the Euphrates River (cf. Genesis 15:18). It was a time of national peace due to their military might and the rise of Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 14; 1 Chronicles 26). This was the time of Israel's greatest prosperity but also a time of their deepest sin. Since they had no wars to fight and no enemies to face, they became very prosperous and very materialistic. They

loved the things of the flesh and the world. They were full of social, individual, and religious corruption. These were the issues that Amos, Hosea, and Micah were sent by God to address.

Special Passages of Peculiar Interest

The Peril of Privilege

The **first** lesson from the book of Amos is privileges and a special relationship with God are a wonderful thing to have, but they have obligations. It was good to have privileges and prosperity, but this brought the peril of being prosperous. Amos said, *“You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins”* (Amos 3:2). There are several passages that describe this particular and special relationship that the nation of Israel had with the Lord. In Exodus 19:3-6 Israel had just come out of Egyptian captivity. They were at the foot of Mount Sinai and God was speaking to Moses, telling him what he was to tell the people.

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.’

All that God required was that they obey Him and keep His commandments. If they did these things, then out of all the nations of the earth, He would choose them. They would not

only be His inheritance, they would also be a kingdom of priests ruling the world with Him.

Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and by his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today (Deuteronomy 4:37-38).

Because God loved their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He was calling Israel to be His peculiar people. Moses said, “*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession*” (Deuteronomy 7:6). Since they were holy to God, and He had chosen them not only to be His people but also His treasured possession, surely that ought to be enough to keep them faithful to God. But it was not.

Moses reminded Israel of this in Deuteronomy 26:19: “*He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.*” God had promised that they would be holy, but He had also promised that He would set them high above all of the other nations of the earth. His only requirement was that they love Him and keep His commandments.

The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crop of

your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you (Deuteronomy 28:9-11).

They were the most privileged people on earth. Out of all the families on the earth, Israel had been chosen by the Lord to be His chosen people and His inheritance. They belonged to Him by right of choice and because He had redeemed them from bondage by bringing them out of Egypt. Because of this relationship and because of their sins, He must punish them. He could not be true to Himself if He let them go undisciplined. That is a powerful lesson.

The people of God today are privileged because God has redeemed them from the world and brought them into His own heavenly place. Since God's people dwell in the kingdom of God, which is the church of the Living One and the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, they are the privileged people on earth today. Because they are privileged, they must remember the greater measure of grace and responsibility that is incurred. If God's people today despise the grace of God, if they live in contempt of His grace, then greater punishment is called for. The Bible teaches that the contempt of God's grace is a greater sin in the sight of God than the violation of His law (cf. Romans 1-3). Grace that is despised condemns a person more quickly than the law being violated: *"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins"* (Amos 3:2). Privilege not only implies but demands responsibility. If God gives prosperity, then there must be a lifestyle focused on Him.

Unholy Religion

The **second** lesson from the book of Amos is that not all religion is holy to God. "Sin in God's house" is the theme of Amos 4:4-5.

*'Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more.
Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every*

three years [This could be translated 'on the third day.']. *Burn leavened* [They should have burned 'unleavened bread.'] *bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings* [These offerings were supposed to be done in private, but they were openly boasted about.] — *boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,* 'declares the Sovereign LORD.

Bethel was a city very close to Jerusalem. There was no reason to build a shrine in Bethel because it was only about twenty-five miles to the city of Jerusalem where God had ordained His tabernacle and temple. Gilgal was in the north and Bethel was in the south, so the people had established a holy place in the north and the south. The result of this was that they were going to these shrines to worship, and their worship was not the way the Lord had ordained, but the way that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had ordained. They did not go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship. They were bringing their sacrifices every morning, but they were not bringing them to the place God had ordained. They were not worshipping where God dwelled. They were either bringing their tithes for the poor every three years or possibly going beyond the law and bringing a tithe every three days. They were offering up thank offerings to God, but they did it the way they wanted to with leavened bread instead of unleavened bread. They were still giving free will offerings to God, but they were bragging about it to the people around them. They were doing what the Pharisees did in Jesus' day and blowing their own trumpet to announce their good deeds (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

This teaches that there was no lack of religion in Israel. They had plenty of religion, but it was just not God's religion. The patrons of the cult that Jeroboam had set up brought their offerings and their tithes over and over again, but contrary to their intended purpose, it amounted to nothing more than sin. They were sinning in the very worship that they were trying to render to God.

Amos 5:21-23 tells the kind of worship service that God cannot stand.

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Their religion, though lavishly supplied with enough offerings and festivals to please any self-gratifying God, could not please the Lord or turn away His wrath. He required what they were not willing to offer: justice and obedience. They were doing what God had commanded, but two things were wrong. **Number one**, their heart was not in it. **Number two**, their life was not overflowing with what the law demanded: justice and righteousness. Religion alone is not enough. Just as the Pharisees of the New Testament were more religious than anyone else, these people in Amos' day were trying their best to please God by a religion that they wanted to bring before Him. They were only doing what they really wanted to do. They were not trying to serve God; they were trying to appease God by satisfying and serving themselves.

Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?' — skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The LORD has sworn by the Pride of

Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done'
(Amos 8:4-6).

Religion that is confined to the sanctuary is worse than no religion at all. Hypocrisy is worse than atheism, for it camouflages the sickness that grace is meant to heal. Hypocrisy is a denial of both the reality of sin and the power of the grace of God. That was the point Paul was making in Romans 1-3. Man cannot find the word of God, the will of God, or the way of God through his own searching. Although their religion was performed with zeal and great sacrifice, the selfish motive was unmistakable. Amos had not actually heard the people saying words like he states in the above passage, but he heard them through their actions. Indeed, the actions of a man declare where his heart is, and those actions speak louder than his words ever could.

God Is Greater Than Their Religion

The **third** lesson in the book of Amos is that God is greater than man's religion. God is much greater than Israel thought Him to be. Their religion depicted God as some little being that could be satisfied by the penance that they brought Him and by the little sacrifices they offered. They needed to see what God was really like. That was what Amos declared in chapter 5.

You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground (he who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land — the LORD is his name — he flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin)...
(Amos 5:7-9).

He simply said that their false life proved that they did not

know what God was like. Their oppression of the poor proved that they did not know what God was like. Their religion proved that they did not know what God was like.

What **is** God like? He **is** the Creator. He said that He made the Pleiades and Orion. He made the stars before He set them in the sky. He **is** the one who keeps everything in existence. He called for the waters and poured them out upon the earth. He **is** the judge. He flashed destruction and destroyed the stronghold. Amos said, "Listen! The Lord, who has sent me here to declare to you your sins, is no whimsical local deity whose dominion is limited by geographical boundaries. By virtue of His creative power, I want you to know that He walks on the high places where you have built your pagan shrine in which you pray to your nature god. You need to serve the God that made nature."

Justice Is Elemental and Eternal

The **fourth** lesson to learn from the book of Amos is that justice is what God wants, and His justice is eternal.

. . . you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts (Amos 5:10-12).

Notice the actions of the people. They hated the truth, trampled on the poor, and lived in luxury. The first two actions resulted from the third one. Anyone who desires to live in luxury ends up hating the truth of God because God's truth is that true religion is not only to keep oneself unspotted from the world, but it is to visit and care for the widows, orphans, and

the poor (cf. James 1:27). The law provided for that also. They were to give a tithe every third year that was exclusively for the poor. If they were giving that tithe, they could not live in luxury; so if they lived in luxury, they had to hate the truth.

There was corruption or fraud in the market place.
Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?' — skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat (Amos 8:4-6).

They trampled the poor, but they did so by using dishonest weights and scales. The primary problem was they were dishonest in their heart.

The very first word of condemnation that Amos gave to Israel was for their oppression of the poor, and then oppression from the heart:

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. [Why?] They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed' (Amos 2:6-7a).

The latter part of this condemnation dealt with the real oppression of the poor in the courts. They were stealing from the poor what little bit God had left them. They were oppressing God through their oppression of the poor: “‘Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name’” (Amos 2:7b). They could not literally oppress God, but it

appeared that they were oppressing Him by their actions. It was only the righteous who could cause people to blaspheme God. If the person who claimed to serve God was oppressing the poor and performing sexual immorality instead of actually serving God, then the Gentiles who saw this would blaspheme God.

Notice that they were also very oppressive toward their brothers: *“They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines”* (Amos 2:8). The poor brother would come to work for enough money in order to eat that day. Those living in luxury would loan him the money, he would be paid at the end of the day and he would come back and repay them. As a means to insure that they would be repaid, they would take his garment that he did not need during the day because it was his bed and a shield against the cold at night. They would hold his garment until he repaid them, then instead of giving his garment back, they would keep it. These people were keeping the garments of the poor. They were oppressing their brothers. Such people must get ready to face the judgment of God.

Ease and Idleness Lead To Open Sin

The **fifth** lesson to learn from Amos is that ease, idleness, and luxury lead to open sin. There are three passages that prove this.

On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,’ declares the Lord (Amos 3:14-15).

The oppression of the poor led them to own a winter house, a summer house, and an ivory house. There was nothing wrong

with owning a mansions, but they had oppressed the poor to be able to purchase them. They were letting people starve in Israel while they lived in four huge and beautiful mansions:

You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; [They will not live in these houses because they will be carried away to Assyria to live in captivity.] though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine (Amos 5:11).

Somebody else will eat their food, drink their wine and live in their houses.

Amos spoke to those in Zion who were complacent. They were at ease in the house of God.

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph (Amos 6:4-6).

There was not a thing wrong with any of the riches Israel enjoyed. There was nothing wrong with having beds inlaid with ivory or having couches to lay on. There was nothing wrong with having choice lambs or eating mutton. There was nothing wrong with fattening calves so that you might be able to dine on their meat. There was nothing wrong with playing instruments while one sings the good songs that brings joy to the heart. All of that had been commanded by God. There was nothing wrong with wine, in and of itself, or fine lotions. There was nothing wrong with all the cosmetics that make people beautiful and smell better. The problem Israel was having

comes after the word “**but**.” Amos said, “You lie on these beds. You lounge on these couches. You eat this meat. You enjoy the music of the day. You drink wine. You anoint yourself with lotions.” “. . . **but** you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph” (Amos 6:6b).

It was wrong for Israel to do these things without being concerned with what was happening in the world around it. The same is true for God’s people today. They need to grieve for the afflictions of those who are less fortunate: “*Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end*” (Amos 6:7). Their ease, their idleness, their luxury, and their oppression of the poor led to open sin. The list of their material things showed the ease, idleness, and luxury that pervaded their lives. They had a winter house, a summer house, an ivory house, and a great house. They had stone mansions, ivory beds, rich food, loud music, abundant wine, and fine cosmetics. They did not have the one thing they needed; they were not concerned about which God was concerned.

God is concerned that people hear His word, love His word, and obey His word. He is concerned that there be no one who is poor in the land. The poor need to be fed, the widows need to be housed, and the orphans need to be clothed. That is the will and purpose of God. God’s people can not let their fine manner of life rob them of the concerns that God wants them to have for others. If they do, then it has robbed them of God.

Love God. Love His word. Love your neighbors. Love yourself. Have peace in believing that.

AMOS (Part 3)

Introduction

This chapter will conclude the study of the book of Amos. There are some special passages of particular interest within the book of Amos that were very important to the people of that day, but they are also applicable today.

Special Passages of Peculiar Interest (. . .continued)

Wild, Wicked Women

This next passage is the **sixth** lesson in the study of the book of Amos. He discussed the “wild, wicked women” in Amos 4:1-3.

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’ The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: ‘The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. You will each go straight out through breaks in the wall, and you will be cast into Harmon,’ declares the LORD.

He called these women “*fat cows of Bashan!*” (cf. Psalms 22:12; Ezekiel 39:18). The men were called bulls of Bashan in the book of Psalms. The idea being conveyed is one of fatness because Bashan was an area of lush pastures and beautiful land

where the cows and bulls grew to a great size. These women were called “*fat cows*” because of their desire for the goods and sustenance of life. They were oppressors of the poor just like the other people of the land. They pushed their husbands to do evil because they desired the things that evil could bring them. These cruel, heartless women were given the bitterest denunciation from God because nobody controls the destiny of a nation as much as the women do. They really were in control because they controlled the children and their husband.

Someone has said that this is a shepherd’s rough picture of women. They were a troop of heavy, heedless cows trampling every frail and lowly object in their way because of their anxiety for food. This was also the prophet’s insight into the character of the ordinary matrons of Samaria who rocked the cradles, nursed the children, and tended to the houses. They were not famous, wicked women like Jezebel, Messalina, or Lady Macbeth. Thoughts of luxury were able to make brutes out of women of gentle nature with a home and religion. They were guilty of driving their husbands to commit crimes in order to satisfy their selfish appetites and desires. Isaiah said the same thing about the women of his day (cf. Isaiah 3:16-4:1). They were interested in cosmetic cases, jewelry, houses, food, parties, and offices but were not concerned about the poor.

Thoughtless Unconcern: Strongholds That Are Not Strong

The **seventh** lesson from the book of Amos is the lesson of not being concerned with what God is concerned with.

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their

land larger than yours? You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end (Amos 6:1-7).

This was a description of severe judgment because they were at ease, felt safe and wise, and felt like they would escape the judgment of God. They would be judged. The background of their sin was that they trusted in some strongholds that in reality were not strong. They felt secure in a religious privilege that they had already lost. They felt secure in a mountain stronghold that would not be able to sustain them. They felt secure in leaders who would fail them at the end. They were not concerned because they had made **three assumptions** that were not true and would not guard them when trouble came.

“God Is Our God and We Are His People”

Their **first** assumption was “God is our God, we are His people and, therefore, we cannot be judged.” The first part of their assumption was right. God was their God, and they were His people. But that was the reason they were going to be judged. Remember from the last chapter the discussion on the peril of privilege. They thought that privilege demanded continued blessing. Instead it implied and involved continuing responsibility. They were not living up to the circumstances relating to their relationship with God.

“God Brought Israel Out Of Egypt”

Their **second** assumption was that God brought Israel out

of Egypt. They thought this meant God would not forsake them. God had brought Israel up out of Egypt (cf. Amos 2:10). He also brought other people up out of captivity. Israel was not the only “exodus people” (cf. Amos 6). It was not because they were not God’s people that they would be judged. They would be judged because they were God’s people. As God’s people they had no room for complacency. They did not have the right to be idle just because they were the people of God. The people of God have been made His people to serve Him.

“We Worship God Regularly”

Their **third** assumption was that since Israel worshiped God regularly they had the right to demand His blessing. However, it was not rites and rituals that God wanted. He wanted righteousness.

I hate, I despise your feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

When the crust of this decaying society was removed, the creature inside was even worse. Against the clamor of social festivities, commercial trading, and ritual chanting was the dreadful silence of society’s patrons who did not grieve over the ruin of Joseph (Israel) (cf. Amos 6:6).

If there was a sin that was at the bottom of all evil, this was it. Israel’s social and political leaders had sunk to the level of unfeeling disregard for the crumbling empire around them. They were letting the ways of God and His kingdom crumble about their feet, and they did not care. As long as they had

enough to eat, beds to lie upon, houses to live in, and the poor to oppress, they were happy.

Amos and Amaziah, The Priest Of Bethel

A Meddling Priest

The **eighth** lesson from Amos is the differences in the characters of Amos and Amaziah:

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: ‘Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: “Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.” Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom’ (Amos 7:10-13).

Amaziah was a meddling priest who as the king’s man appealed to force. He sent a letter to Jeroboam, and in that letter there is partial truth and a partial lie. Amos had not said that Jeroboam would die by the sword. He said speaking for God, “. . . with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam” (Amos 7:9). The house of Jeroboam was Israel. Amos did not say that Jeroboam himself would die, but he appealed to the force of Jeroboam to silence this prophet. Amaziah was prompted by jealousy because the people were listening to Amos. Amos was threatening his place as the prophet of Jeroboam’s house. He had a vested interest that caused him to make a lying accusation. Falsehood and violence were the traditional way that false prophets rose against the kingdom of light. Amaziah judged Amos’ morals by his own standards of morality.

Amaziah said, “*Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there*” (Amos 7:12). It was evident that he held his office for the payment that it offered him. He was a professional preacher. He actually commits idolatry by the very argument he uses. He said, “*This is the king’s sanctuary.*” He did not say, “This is God’s sanctuary.” This sanctuary was the creation of the king, not the creation of God.

A Faithful Prophet, Amos, the Lord’s Man

Amos was a faithful prophet. His response to Amaziah showed the contrast of these two men.

Amos answered Amaziah, ‘I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land’ (Amos 7:14-17).

Amos was the Lord’s man, in contrast to Amaziah, who was the king’s man. Amos was humble. He said, “My prophesying is because I received an assignment from God. I am not following a profession. This is not my career. I have only come this one time to deliver God’s message.” He was loyal to the commission that God had given him. God had chosen Amos, and Amos was unconditionally loyal to God. He was zealous for the ways of God. Amaziah certainly spoke the

truth when he said, “*The land cannot bear all his words*” (Amos 7:10a).

Amos was a bold preacher. Once he had been prohibited to preach, he preached even more. Prohibition was treated as a challenge to really fulfill the work that God had sent him to do. All of God’s prophets and spokesmen should have Amos’ boldness and courage.

A Harrowing Picture

Amos gave a harrowing picture for Amaziah’s future. There would be family dishonor. His wife would become a prostitute. His children would fall by the sword. There would be family impoverishment. He would lose his land (cf. Amos 7:17). A Hebrew’s property was his inheritance from the Lord. There would be family extermination because all of his children would die. He would die childless, which was total disaster to a Hebrew. This was a dishonorable death. He would die and be buried in a foreign land. No Jew could die happy knowing that they would be buried in a heathen country.

A Clenching Argument, “The Word of the Lord”

The final argument given in the book of Amos is that Amos spoke for God: “*Thus saith the LORD, the word of God*” (cf. Amos 1:3,6, 9,11,13; 2:1,4,6; 3:1,11,13; 4:2; 5:3,4,16; 6:8,11,14). Amos spoke for God and only God. The false prophets spoke for themselves or whoever paid them. Amaziah spoke for the king, but Amos spoke “the Word of the Lord.”

The Sins of Israel

The **ninth** lesson from the book of Amos is the sins of Israel which brought about their destruction. These sins will be briefly mentioned.

Oppression of the Poor

Number one: the oppression of the poor.

You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground (he who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land — the LORD is his name — he flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin), you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine (Amos 5:7-11).

Bribery of Judges

Number two: the judges who could be bribed. As a man once said, “They had the best judges money could buy.” Amos 5:12 says, “*For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.*”

Dishonest Businessmen

Number three: the dishonest businessmen and dishonest business practices.

Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?’ — skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat (Amos 8:4-6).

Sale of the Righteous Into Slavery

Number four: the fact that the righteous people were being sold into slavery. They treated people as if they were mere objects.

This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name' (Amos 2:6-7).

Sexual Immorality

Number five: the sexual immorality so bad that a man and his son used the same prostitute (cf. Amos 2:7).

Telling The Prophets Not To Preach

Number six: telling the prophets not to preach. They did not want to hear the word of God (cf. Amos 2:12; 5:10).

Materialism, Women, and People

Number seven: the fact that the nation was full of materialism. The women were said to be materialistic (cf. Amos 4:11). The entire nation is described as being this way as well (cf. Amos 3:15; 6:1-6). Extravagance and excess is condemned; there were those who owned a summer-house and a winter-house, decorated with ivory inlay; while others of the nation were in poverty and want.

Religious Corruption

Number eight: religious corruption (cf. Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23). Corruption is the sin that is at the base of all sins. Their concept of God and their view of the nature of God caused them to be dreadful due to the sin that they were in.

Hope For the Future

The **ninth lesson** from the book of Amos is one of hope because Amos offered hope for the future. His theme was the judgment and the destruction of Israel and the house of Jeroboam, but he did offer hope for the future.

Amos Offered A Program To Reverse The Forces Of Decay

Amos offered a program to reverse the forces of decay that were wasting the society. The solution could be summed up in “Seek the Lord and Live!”

This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: ‘Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing. Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it (Amos 5:4).

Seeking the LORD was the simple way to avoid destruction. If they did that they would live. They could not seek anything or anyone else. Amos added the tragic word “*perhaps*,” when he said quite simply, “*Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph*” (Amos 5:15) Amos was not sure that they would be able to seek God in a way that would really bring His blessings.

Amos Closed With Vision of David’s House Being Restored

Amos closed with the only real hope that Amos knew would be possible. That was the hope of the Messiah and the hope of the Messianic kingdom. He was not sure that Israel would be able to turn from their evil and seek God in time to save the nation. He

was right. They did not turn from their evil in time to save the nation of Israel, but Amos closed with a vision of David's house being restored. This passage was quoted in Acts 15:16 and applied to the kingdom of God – today is the church of the living God.

'In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,' declares the LORD, who will do these things. 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,' says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11-15).

Amos made five points in this passage.

First, he said that the entire kingdom of David, the house of David, and the tabernacle of David would be restored. It was predicted that Jesus would reign over the house of David. He would sit on David's throne and rule David's house (cf. Luke 1:31-33). The kingdom of David was restored in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, he said that the kingdom would embrace all the nations. The kingdom would not just be Edom or just Israel. It would be all the nations that were called by His name. When Peter preached the gospel for the first time on the day of Pentecost he said that all of those who believed, obeyed, and were baptized would receive the Spirit as a part of God's promise. That was God's promise to the Jews standing there, to their children, and to all Jews who would ever exist, even as many as the Lord our God

will call to Him (cf. Acts 2:38-39). Paul said that those Gentiles who were far off were brought near by the blood of Christ (cf. Ephesians 2:11-22). Those who were not a part of the covenant of God were fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. Those who had no hope have hope in Jesus. The kingdom of God today, the church of the living God, embraces all the nations (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Third, Amos said that the kingdom would be blessed with abundance. That was what he meant when he said the one treading grapes would be overtaken by those who were planting new grapes, and the man who was reaping the wheat would be overtaken by the plowman. They did not even get the wheat harvested until they were ready to sow again. This was talking about a time of abundance. Paul said that Christians are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3). He also told the Philippians, *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19). He told the Corinthians that the God who supplies seed for the sower will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:10). The kingdom of God today is blessed by God Himself, and by *“... Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that is at work in us”* (Ephesians 3:20 KJV). This is the kingdom that Amos saw, and it is the kingdom that Jesus established.

Fourth, Amos said that this kingdom would be blessed with peace. The kingdom would defeat all their enemies and have peace in the land. Peace is a difficult word to properly define. It is not simply the cessation of conflict because many times the warfare is over but peace has not been established. Peace is a right relationship, or at least, it is the result of a right relationship. The writer of the book of Hebrews discussed this same kind of peace. He was trying to give the Hebrew Christians who were in danger of leaving Jesus' kingdom and going back to the old kingdom a final reason not to return to the past. The old kingdom was the Law under the old covenant.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21).

The Hebrew writer said that the God of peace made peace and equipped the people for peace not only by the blood of Jesus but also by the resurrection of Christ. There are two things that guarantee peace for the kingdom of God: the cross of Christ and the grave of Christ, which today is still empty. The tomb could not hold Christ. The power of God emptied the tomb. When death strikes it puts fear into the heart of every man. If the tomb could not hold Christ, then it cannot hold any of God's children. This is why the Christian has peace. That peace is through Christ: "*For he himself is our peace, . . .*" (Ephesians 2:14). Peace is in Jesus and is given to those who are His possession.

The **fifth** thing that Amos said about the kingdom was that it would last forever: "*I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,*" says the *LORD your God*" (Amos 9:15). The Hebrew writer said the kingdom was in existence then and Christians could dwell in it. Christians today have that same privilege.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words "once more" indicates the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and

so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire' (Hebrews 12:25-28).

The writer of Hebrews said that whatever was shaken could be removed, but Christians are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken or destroyed. That is the kingdom Amos was speaking of. The Jews of the first century were in the kingdom that Amos prophesied about. That prophecy was really the force behind the entire New Testament. The time has come, and that kingdom is here. What God promised throughout all of the Old Testament is now a reality.

In closing, look at what Paul said,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Amos said that there would be a kingdom that would last forever. That kingdom would be a glory to God forever. What did Paul say to the Ephesians? What does this say to Christians today? He said that glory is to be given to God forever and ever in the church and in Christ Jesus. Amos said that glory happens in the kingdom. Paul said that it would be done in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever (cf. Ephesians 3:20-21). The King James Version translates this verse: “. . . *world without end, Amen*” (Eph 3:21 KJV). That is literally all that needs to be said about Amos' prophecy, about the kingdom, and about Paul's statement that it has come.

Glory be to God in His kingdom, the church of which Jesus is the head. Glory will be paid to God now, glory will be paid to God in heaven, and glory will be paid to God through out all eternity. May all who believe that find peace.

HOSEA, THE PROPHET OF LOVE (Part 1)

Introduction

It has been said that all the world loves a lover. This has been true through the ages, and it is still true today. Only in Jesus is there a greater example of love than Hosea. Hosea was definitely among the champion lovers of all times. His love was so powerful that even the vilest behavior that came from his wife could not dull it. Each time his suffering plunged to near despair, he learned more than he had ever known before about the infinite heart of God, who was the greater sufferer. His wife, Gomer, broke his heart again and again, but his forgiving attitude and action toward her gave a deep insight into the heart of the Divine Lover, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Date and Writer of the Book of Hosea

The next two chapters analyze the life and teaching of this rare individual who was the prophet of love. Like Amos, he prophesied to the nation of Israel in the middle of the eighth century sometime around 745 or 740 BC.

Judah's kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were at times co-rulers. The first three seemed to be co-rulers for the last year of Uzziah's reign. Uzziah was a good king; Jotham and Ahaz were evil kings; and Hezekiah was a good king. Israel's king during the time that Hosea served and prophesied was Jeroboam II. He reigned from 783 to 743 BC.

It was probably during Jeroboam's latter years that Hosea

prophesied. This would have been shortly before Israel's fall. This is indicated in Hosea 7:9b, where speaking of Ephraim, Hosea said, "*His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice.*" He was getting old and did not know it. The nation of Israel died at the time they thought they were the strongest. They thought they were young and had all the viral strength of youth. However, that was not true.

There are parallel passages in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles that contain information about the days in which Hosea was prophesying that show that this time was similar to the time in which Amos was writing. It was a time of unparalleled prosperity, financially, and politically and a time of unparalleled depth of depravity in their morals and religion. It was probably because of this that Hosea had decided not to marry. Being a prophet was the totality of his life. However, God commanded him to marry a woman that he knew from the beginning would be unfaithful to him (cf. Hosea 1:2).

The Outline of the Book

The outline of the book only summarizes Hosea's writing because Hosea is not a book of collected sermons. It is a book that emphasizes from start to finish three thoughts which divide the book into three parts: Israel's unfaithfulness to God (cf. Hosea 1-3), Israel's national sins (cf. Hosea 4-13), and Israel's hope (cf. Hosea 14).

Israel's Unfaithfulness

Hosea's experience with his wife and children were parallel to God's experience with his wife and children, Israel. Hosea had a wife named Gomer and three children; God had a wife named Israel and three children. Those three children represent the experiences that God would have with the people of Israel. Hosea stood for God, the loving, patient husband; Gomer stood for Israel, the lustful, immoral wife; and the

children stood for the Israelites, the scattered, unpitied, unloved, rejected, and strange children.

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel: When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.' So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Then the LORD said to Hosea, 'Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel' (Hosea 1:1-5).

Jehu destroyed all of the house of Ahab with the sword (cf. 2 Kings 10:1-17). God evidently was not pleased with that because He was going to bring upon the house of Jehu and Jeroboam II punishment for that massacre. That was what the boy's name meant, "Jehovah will punish." God was going to put an end to the kingdom of Israel. *'Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, 'Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, [This name means "unloved" or "unpitied." This was the way Hosea was feeling in his house. That is the way the Lord had felt for years in His house of Israel. He was married to a woman who no longer loved Him or His work.]*

. . . 'for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them – not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God' (Hosea 1:6-7).

This event actually happened when the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army, but God sent a destroying angel to save the nation, and they did not have to fight a single battle (cf. Isaiah 38-39; 2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 32:1-23). There were two children. The first one was named Jezreel, which meant “Jehovah will punish Israel.” The second child was named Lo-Ruhamah, which meant “Neither Hosea, nor the Lord, is loved by his wife.”

After Gomer weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son: “*Then the LORD said, ‘Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God’*” (Hosea 1:9). That perplexing doubt of how God felt had become a certainty. There was born in the prophet’s house a child that did not belong to him. This child was the result of his wife’s love affair with the men of Israel (Israel is the pagan people that she loves) rather than with her loving husband as God would have it.

The names of these children tell the story of what was going on in Hosea’s house, but they also tell what was going on in Jehovah’s house. Jehovah would have to punish His children. He was unloved by His wife, Israel, who had borne Him strange children by pagan gods. But Hosea was such a lover, such a deliverer of hope, that he added a “yet.” In spite of all that had happened, Hosea said,

Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel (Hosea 1:10-11).

Hosea said that the day was coming when everything would be reversed. The unloved would be loved; those who were not God’s people would become His people. The

scattering that was a judgment would become the scattering that was a sowing, and out of that sowing would arise one great nation. That nation, of course, would be the kingdom of God, which in the Messianic sense is the church of Jesus Christ.

Chapter two of Hosea is a long discourse of pleading with the mother (cf. Hosea 2:2-23). The children were to plead with the mother and say, “Why were you not joined to our father? Why are you estranged from our house? Why have you left our house and gone after your lovers? Were you not loved by our father? Were you not cared for by our father? Were you not forgiven by our father? Why have you gone after all of these strange men?” The parallel would be that the people of Israel should plead with each other as to why they had left Jehovah.

Israel left Jehovah because of lack of love. Gomer left Hosea’s house just as Israel left God’s house. God expressed His love by telling Hosea to go get his wife back. What had happened to her? She had worn herself out with her lovers. No one would love her so she was being sold in the marketplace as a household slave. God told Hosea to go to the market place and buy back his wife:

The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes’ (Hosea 3:1).

Israel was idolatrous. They had left Jehovah, and Hosea must know how God felt if He was going to convey that feeling to Israel. God had Hosea go to the market place and buy back this immoral woman who had prostituted herself with every man in the city and was no longer wanted by any one except Hosea. “So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. [Fifteen shekels is about \$100.00. A homer and a lethek of barley were about ten bushels which was worth about \$10.00. So Hosea bought Gomer for \$110.00.]

Then I told her, ‘You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you’” (Hosea 3:2-3).

This verse ought to read, “*I will not live with you.*” She was to be in the corner of the house as no man’s wife. She would not have a lover, nor a husband, until she returned to Hosea in love, honesty, and purity. Hosea 3:4-5 explained the parallel of this verse to Israel.

For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

It is possible that Gomer did the same thing. After Gomer had been many days without any lover or husband, she might have come to her senses and gone with real love and repentance to plead with Hosea for him to take her as his wife again. Hosea naturally would have accepted her just as God accepted Israel. This happened with the Israelites when they came back together in one kingdom as the text said. They came trembling and repentant seeking Jehovah (cf. Acts 2:1-47). And, of course, Jehovah was ready to forgive them. The father is always looking out the window with a robe, a ring, shoes, and a fatted calf for any prodigal son that will come home (cf. Luke 15:11-31). The Lord is always willing to save those that will repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Israel’s National Sins and Chastisement

The next division of the book of Hosea discussed Israel’s national sins and the chastisement of God (cf. Hosea 4-13). There were seven steps to judgment in these chapters which built on each other. Hosea, inspired by the Spirit, sat down and thought about the sins of Israel and the steps that led to Israel’s destruction.

Israel's Lacks

First, there was a picture of Israel's sin and the lack of knowledge of God. When knowledge was available and God's people remained ignorant, that was sinful.

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: 'There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying. But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother – my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; . . .to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of my people' (Hosea 4:1-12a).

Israel, with knowledge totally available to them, turned away from the knowledge of God to pursue immorality and to fulfill their own desires. The first step in Israel's fall was a lack of knowledge. Ignorance always results in pride.

The **second** step in Israel's fall was arrogance. Arrogance and pride had come because they were ignorant of God.

Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now

turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD. Israel's arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them (Hosea 5:1-5).

They were doing things that would not allow them to return to God. Pride went before destruction (cf. Proverbs 16:18), but ignorance came before pride. Because they refused to become knowledgeable about God and because of their ignorance of God's character and nature, they were full of pride and selfish ambition. Pride can lead a person to become unstable.

The **third** step in Israel's fall was instability. They were unstable because their arrogance got in the way, even though some of them wanted to return to God.

Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth (Hosea 6:1-3).

That all sounded very good. They were good words that said, "We need to return to God." However, look at 6:4: "*What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.*" Their words were like the dew. They would go away as soon as the sun came up. They were not lasting words. The people were religious with their talk, but as soon as the sun rose, they practiced a worldliness that really characterized their lives.

Ignorance leads to pride, pride leads to instability, and instability leads to worldliness. Worldliness was the **fourth** step in Israel's fall.

Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over. Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realize it. His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice. Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him (Hosea 7:8-10).

Israel had mixed herself with the world when she was to be separate from the world. Because the Israelites did not know about God and because of their pride and instability, they were appealing to the world for their strength, honor, glory, and their health.

The **fifth** step Hosea covered was a long discussion about how Israel would reap the consequences of mixing themselves with the world. There was deep corruption that set in when worldliness became the practice and standard of life: "*They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins*" (Hosea 9:9). "*The days of Gibeah*" were days of deep sexual immorality, national apathy, and apostasy (cf. Judges 19-21). They had corrupted themselves to the point that they no longer cared for the nation, for the Law of God, and they no longer cared for God Himself. God had planted Israel as a luxurious, fruitful vine, but they would be destroyed because of their corruption (cf. Hosea 10:1-15).

Worldliness leads to corruption, which then leads to the **sixth** step for Israel — backsliding: "*My people are determined to turn from me*" (Hosea 11:7a). The American Standard Version translates this: "*And my people are bent on backsliding from me.*" They had turned away from God. He would by no means exalt them even if they called to the Most High. Solomon said that if people turn away from following God long

enough, when they do cry out to God, He will laugh in the day of their distress (Proverbs 1:24-26). Israel had reached that point. They could cry out to God as much as they wanted and for as long as they wanted, but God would not hear them. A lack of knowledge had led to pride, pride led to instability, instability to worldliness, worldliness to corruption, and corruption to backsliding.

The **seventh** and final step was that of idolatry. After Hosea had reminded them of their history (cf. Hosea 12:1-14), he said:

When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel. But he became guilty of Baal worship and died. Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, 'They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calf-idols.' Therefore, they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window (Hosea 13:1-3).

Israel's pathway to destruction was presented by Hosea one step at a time in a logical order: ignorance, pride, instability, worldliness, corruption, backsliding, and idolatry.

Israel's Future Hope

Through all of this God remained Israel's God. Because He had remained loyal to the Israelites, there was hope for their future. Hosea listed the divine requirements for Israel. They were told to repent, pray, and trust (cf. Hosea 14:1-3). That was all that God demanded. They needed to turn from their evil, then call out to Him and trust Him. Only after these things had been done would there be a divine remedy (cf. Hosea 14:4-6). There would be healing and love from God. There would be love for God. There would be great blessings of supply that

would come from the reservoir of God. If they would repent, then God would repent and change His ways toward them.

When God changed His ways toward them, there would be a divine result:

... his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon (Hosea 14:6-7).

Israel would become a deeply rooted tree if they would return to God. This tree would be one that could not be uprooted. It would be one that the world would come to for relaxation and shade beneath its branches. Israel would become a flourishing tree full of food. Their grain would prosper and the whole world would come to eat because of Israel's crop that the Lord God had given. He was saying that not only would the wine be good for Israel, but their wine would be good for the entire world. This was the divine result of their repentance.

Finally, there was the divine resource for Israel. Hosea said, "*O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me*" (Hosea 14:8). God would bless Israel, not simply with fruit for them to eat but with fruitfulness for all the people of the world. The day would come when the whole world would be blessed with Jewish blessings in the kingdom of God, which was to be the church of the living God.

God blessed them with wisdom:

Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them (Hosea 14:9).

There was hope for Israel, which was based on three simple requirements: repent, pray, and trust God. When these requirements were met, three things would happen. There would be a great remedy, which was God's healing, God's love, and God's supply. There would be a great result in that there would be a tree, a drink, and blessings for all the world. There would be great wisdom as Israel became the fruit and the wisdom for the entire world.

This covers the outline of the book of Hosea. The next chapter will cover the teachings of the book. The theme of the book was God's love and His suffering nature. The message of his book was God's desire to forgive and to receive again the people of God, the Israelites. God is always waiting anxiously for the return of His wandering bride.

In summary, Hosea said that in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness as a prostituting bride, and in spite of all of its sins ranging from ignorance to idolatry, God was still anxiously waiting to forgive. In spite of all their unfaithfulness to God and their lack of love to God, God remained faithful and loving toward them. That message carried over into the New Testament. Jesus Christ came just as Hosea came to be the living representative of the love of God. He came to say, "Here is how much God loves you: God loves you just as Hosea loved his wife Gomer." More importantly, God loves His creation, as was shown in Jesus' love for the world on Calvary's cross. Faith is great, hope is fine but love is greatest of all. It is love that speaks most deeply of God's character and nature. The book of Hosea is unique in the Old Testament because it portrays God as a suffering, waiting, merciful, loving husband simply awaiting his bride's return to him. Find peace in His love and comfort.

HOSEA, THE PROPHET OF LOVE (Part 2)

Introduction

This chapter begins by taking another look at the prophet Hosea. He was not a visitor to the northern kingdom so he was not an outsider like Amos. He was the home missionary. He had grown up surrounded by idolatry and corruption, and it appalled his soul from the time of his early childhood. He had evidently decided not to marry because of these evils and because he knew that he could not find a woman who would share with him his deep concern for God and his concern that the people become the people that God wanted them to be.

Hosea was a man of the soil who drew many of his simple images from the garden and farm. As he talked about crops, sheep, and cattle, there was the idea that he was not raised in the urban center of Samaria, Bethel, or Gilgal. It seems as if he was raised on the hillside where, like Amos, he would have been close to God. He would have seen the wide contrasts between God's will and the people's life of disobedience.

Hosea, like God, was a man of deep, loving, and poetic nature. His book often spoke of the loving and caring character of God and of wanting to help the nation of Israel that he loved.

A Review of Hosea From the Last Chapter

The date of this book was approximately 740 B.C., near the middle of the eighth century. This would have been less than twenty years before Israel was invaded by Assyria and carried

into captivity. They would never return except through the kingdom of God, which was the church that was to come.

The outline of the book has three points. **First** is Israel's lack of marital faithfulness to God. God had entered into a covenant relationship with them which was like the covenant of marriage. As a point of illustration, Gomer, Hosea's wife, played the harlot by going after other men. Israel, Jehovah's wife, played the harlot by going after other gods (cf. Hosea 1-3).

Second is the deep national guilt that Hosea saw in Israel. It started with ignorance and ended with idolatry. There was a seven-fold pathway to their ill-health and destruction. Yet in spite of their unfaithfulness with other gods and their national guilt, God still stood ready to bless them if they would only repent, pray, and place their trust in Him (cf. Hosea 4-13).

Third, God offered them hope for the future based upon their repentance, their prayer, and their trust (cf. Hosea 14).

The Teaching of The Book

Theme

The theme of the book of Hosea was God's love and suffering nature. In the midst of nations whose gods never loved their people, Hosea's God loved His people. In the midst of nations whose gods never suffered, Hosea's God did suffer. Hosea learned about love and suffering by his own experience with his wife, Gomer. Hosea loved Gomer in spite of all her immorality and the way that her immorality caused him to suffer. It eventually dawned on him that if he loved Gomer that much, God loved Israel even more; and if he suffered that much with Gomer's sins, God suffered even more with Israel's sins.

Message

The message of the book was God's desire to forgive and restore. Hosea wanted to forgive and restore Gomer. All she had to do was to come home, and he would forgive and restore

her as his wife. This was the way Hosea learned about God's character. Hosea did not learn about God's character from reading a book. He did not learn about God's character from listening to other preachers. He learned about God's character by enduring what God endured. God's children need to do that. They need to get involved in the lives of people to the extent that they will truly know how God feels rather than just reading and hearing about it.

Lessons of Permanent Value

There are many lessons of permanent value that can be learned from this book. **First**, learn about the sacredness and validity of the marriage vow. When God took Israel as His wife, He told her that He would be faithful to her no matter what. God was faithful even when He finally had to divorce Israel due to its ungodliness. But even after He had divorced Himself from her, He always wanted her back. Hosea did the same thing. He took Gomer to be his wife, vowing that he would be faithful to her no matter what. Even after her lovers had become tired of her and she was being sold on the slave market, Hosea's love still drove him back to her. The marriage vow is sacred and holy.

Second, learn that internal corruption is more dangerous to a nation's existence than external enemies. Israel did not fall because of any external enemy. Israel fell because they had turned away from God.

Third, and perhaps the greatest lesson to learn from the book of Hosea, is that God is always ready to forgive. The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most beautiful parables in the Bible (cf. Luke 15). It was a parable that could have been given another name. The lesson is not just in the prodigal son. It is also a parable of the loving father. The lesson is in the fact that God is always at the window searching the horizon, looking for His people who have turned away from Him. That is the great lesson from the book of Hosea — God is anxious, not just willing but anxious to forgive.

Some Special Studies From the Book

There are some special studies in this book that will help to see God's view of things.

God's Figure For the Sinner

How does God view the sinner? How does God look upon the person who willfully and wantonly turns away from Him to sin just because he wants to? There are **ten images** of the sinner. These are not the people who struggle against sin, and because of their weakness of the flesh occasionally fall. These are the people who do not want to follow God. They **want** to be sinners. How does God view them? What does God call the sinner? What is God's picture of the willful and wanton sinner? Hosea gives an excellent look at how God views the sinner:

Hosea said,

The LORD said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes' (Hosea 3:1).

God said that the willful sinner was an adulterer. He saw the sinner as an adulterous wife. That is also what James said in his New Testament book:

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

The sinner is an enemy of God.

God saw the sinner as a wine-flamed drunkard (cf. Hosea 4:11). He said that old wine and new wine take away the

understanding of His people: *“They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. . . .”* (Hosea 4:12). God saw the sinner as a drunkard whether the sinner drank or not. A drunkard cannot do what he wants to do. He cannot go where he wants to go. He stumbles. He falls. He lies in his own vomit. There is nothing that he will not do to get another drink of wine. That is God’s view of the sinner. There is nothing that the sinner will not do to get another shot at sin. There is nothing the sinner will not do to get another boost from his immorality.

Hosea said, *“The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?”* (Hosea 4:16). He called the Israelites a backsliding, stubborn heifer. She was not just any heifer. She was the one that kept going to the same stall to be milked time and time again. If someone tried to get her into another stall, she was stubborn and refused. The Israelites were compared to a heifer who, after it has stomped the wheat in the field, would go back into that pasture to stomp some more, even when there was nothing left to stomp. That is the sinner. The sinner will go back to be pleased in areas where the pleasure has already died. They are ignorant, stubborn backsliders.

The violence of these people was described vividly by Hosea: *“As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes”* (Hosea 6:9). A sinner was like a troop of robbers that would lie in wait on the way to the holy place. When the worshipers came by, they jumped on them. These priests should have been in the temple ready to serve the people, but instead they were lying in wait for them on the pathway to the temple. The sinner is a part of a troop of robbers.

Hosea said, *“All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them calls on me”* (Hosea 7:7). Hosea said that God did not even have to stir the fire that was Israel because they were still flaming hot (cf. Hosea 7:4). They were ready to devour, ready to eat, and ready

to bake. Israel's heart was hot toward sin. It did not need to be stirred up. There was no need to send any temptation to them so that they would sin because they were in the practice of looking for opportunities to sin. Their heart was as hot as an oven that was ready to bake bread.

Ephraim is called out by Hosea: "*Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over*" (Hosea 7:8). They were like a half-baked pancake. Put a pancake on the griddle, let it lay there, and do not turn it over. What happens to the bottom side? It burns. What happens to the top side? It remains raw, which is the way Israel was. Facing downward toward sin, they were hot. Facing upward toward God, they were raw and cold. They were hypocritical. They were going to be judged because of the fact that they were hot toward their sin and cold toward God.

Hosea said, "*Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless – now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria*" (Hosea 7:11). The sinner was like a silly dove. He did not know where to go. Maybe he had eaten some green grain and because of that was drunk. He flew this way and that, then wobbled into a tree, and ran into a fence post. He may die because of his silliness. This is how God sees the sinner. They do not know where to go. They are running everywhere trying to find some new way to gain satisfaction because of their sin.

Hosea warned the sinner:

They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt (Hosea 7:16).

The deceitful or faulty bow was the one that breaks just when the archer was ready to use it against the enemy. He put his arrow in, pulled back on the string, aimed at his opponent, and the bow broke. The archer was left with a useless weapon in his hand as the enemy continued to advance against him. The

sinner holds out the promise that he is going to do something with his life, but at the moment when he is needed, he fails. He is a deceitful bow.

Hosea described who it was who made the calf: *“They are from Israel! This calf—a craftsman has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria”* (Hosea 8:6). The sinner is like a figurine or vessel made by a craftsman. The vessel looks good, but if one pours water in it, the vessel leaks. If one tries to use the figurine, it breaks and cannot be used for anything. Hosea 8:8 says, *“Israel is swallowed up; now she is among the nations like a worthless thing.”* Idolatry had led Israel’s vessel to be unwanted and worthless.

Hosea stated, *“For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers”* (Hosea 8:9). God’s picture of the sinner was one of a wild ass that was in heat. That is a graphic picture. The ass needed fulfillment, but could not find it. He needed satisfaction with no satisfaction available. The Christian needs to look at these **ten images** again and see if they describe himself in any way.

Israel’s Shortcomings

Israel had four things that they lacked. In lacking them, they fell far short of God’s desire for them.

Israel’s **first** shortcoming was a lack of knowledge:

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed’ (Hosea 4:1-2).

In place of the knowledge of God, there was cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, not keeping the covenant, and the

shedding of blood. In other words, God said, “. . . *my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:6).

Hosea wrote, “*I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien*” (Hosea 8:12). The original language of Hebrew said, “*I wrote for them the ten thousand things of my law, and they are regarded as a strange things.*” Of course, there were not literally ten thousand things of the law, but the prophet was saying that there was a multiplicity of things. These things needed to be learned, but instead they were counted as strange things. It is a bothersome thing today when people are talking and something is mentioned about God’s Word and everyone’s eyes go blank. Nobody understands what is being said. Why? Because the Bible is the most neglected book in the world today. Evil things come about because of the lack of knowledge of THE BOOK.

The **second** shortcoming that Hosea mentioned was a lack of faith:

When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores (Hosea 5:13).

Why did not Ephraim turn to God for help? Because he did not believe in God. Why did he turn to the great king of Assyria? Why did he turn to a mere man for help? Because he believed in man. Ephraim was like a silly dove calling to Egypt and then to Assyria, but never calling to God (cf. Hosea 7:11). All they had to do was look up and call to God and He would have emptied heaven of its angels on their behalf. Instead, they cried out to men for help. They would cry out to people for help against those things which the people themselves could not even overcome.

Hosea stated God’s warning: “*Throw out your calf-idol, O Samaria! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity?*” (Hosea 8:5). How long would they be

incapable of purity? As long as they were crying to idols. These idols were dumb, which does not mean that they were ignorant. It meant they were unable to speak — they were mute gods. “Why are you calling out to things that cannot answer? You are calling out to dumb idols, mute stones that cannot answer, when all you have to do is call out to God.” Hosea cried.

Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them (Hosea 11:5-7).

They did not have faith in God. They had faith in themselves. They had faith in their own power. They had faith in their allies and in their allies’ power. They had absolutely no faith in God.

A **third** shortcoming was that Israel needed leadership.

But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother – my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:4-6a).

Hosea said,

Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood. As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes (Hosea 6:8-9).

Hosea said that the priests who should have been the leaders of

the people were actually lying in wait to hurt and destroy the people:

On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers. . . . All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them calls on me (Hosea 7:5-7).

Israel had no leaders, because the men who should have been Israel's leaders were drunks, thieves, and robbers.

The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac. The prophet, along with my God is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God (Hosea 9:7-8).

The only leader Israel had was Hosea, and they called him a madman and a fool.

The **fourth** shortcoming was a lack of love in Israel. This was perhaps the greatest sin of all. There was a lack of love for God. That was the key to Hosea 1-3, where Hosea's experience with Gomer was pictured as God's experience with Israel. Gomer did not love Hosea, and Israel did not love God.

'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love;

I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?’
(Hosea 11:1-5).

They did not love God. They hated God so much they would appeal to anyone other than God. Gomer was that way. Gomer hated Hosea so much that she would go to any man, even selling herself in the marketplace, before she would go home to Hosea and his love.

The True Nature of Sin

Perhaps the primary lesson to be learned from the book of Hosea is the true nature of sin. What is sin? Is sin a trifle thing? Is sin something that should be played around with, or is sin a serpent, a lion, and a devourer?

Sin in the final analysis is unfaithfulness, infidelity, prostitution. The word the King James Version and the American Standard Version uses is whoredom. The word translated prostitution, unfaithfulness, infidelity, or whoredom is found eighteen times in the book of Hosea. It is the key word in all the book. Hosea was trying to say that sin is unfaithfulness to one's mate. It is making a prostitute of a bride and a whore of a wife.

Sin ages the sinner by destroying the youthful spirit of a person. The decay may be gradual and imperceptible, but it is still dangerous and fatal: *“I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah”* (Hosea 5:12). Sin is like a moth eating a garment, and rot eating rust.

Sin is contagious and continual. If someone is continually exposed to its influence time and time again, they cannot hope to escape its consequences: *“And it will be: Like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their deeds”* (Hosea 4:9).

Sin's effects are as certain and as natural as the power of gravity. Sin will destroy just as surely as the power of gravity

will destroy any object that falls a great distance. A person jumping off a building is destroyed from hitting the ground. In just the same way sin destroys lives.

Sin robs people of the power to make moral distinctions. The optic nerve of the soul has been severed by gazing too long and too longingly at immorality. Hosea said, “. . . *to old wine and new which take away the understanding of my people*” (Hosea 4:11). The opposite of that is found in Ephesians 1:18: *“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, . . .”* Paul said God has called us to know the glorious inheritance of the saints. This is the opposite of what sin does in people’s lives.

There are so many things to see and to know if the eyes of the heart are enlightened. Do not look at the world with human eyes. Human eyes often need glasses to see correctly. Man cannot see sin for what it is by observing with his physical eye the consequences of sin. He needs to look into the heart of people and see how it corrupts. He needs to look into hell itself to see the final destiny of the sinner.

Sin is nothing to be toyed with. It is a poisonous snake whose bite kills immediately. It is a roaring lion who devours people, and there is nothing left. Sin is the very opposite of God and the very opposite of love. Love God, hate sin, and find peace in believing in Jesus.

MICAH, MESSAGE OF HOPE (Part 1)

Introduction

The next two chapters in the Minor Prophets will be from and about the book of Micah. Micah takes his place in the prophetic arena of the eighth century as significantly as any of his contemporaries. He has not received as much attention from the scholars as has Isaiah, Hosea, or Amos, but he is, nevertheless, as deserving of attention and study. The brevity of Micah is one of the beautiful characteristics of his book. It is marked by deep insight into the social, religious, and political movements of his day. He grasps the essence of God's requirements and verbalizes the "Golden Rule" of the Old Covenant: "*. . . what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*" (Micah 6:8 KJV). Micah is not as lengthy or as eloquent or, maybe even as perceptive, as his contemporaries, particularly Isaiah, but his impact upon his own and upon subsequent generations can still be measured in the memory of Judean elders in Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 26:17-18 quoting Micah 3:12) and in the word of the teachers to Herod (cf. Matthew 2:6 quoting Micah 5:2). The book of Micah contains a message of hope and promise that permeates his entire book.

The Date of the Book

The Reigns Of Judah's Kings

The date of Micah's book is fairly easy to establish. He

wrote somewhere between 735 and 700 B.C. Many use the date of 725 B.C. because it is easy to remember. Micah wrote during the reign of three Judean kings: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jotham was a fairly good king; Ahaz, a wicked king; and Hezekiah, the best of kings.

The Historical Evidence

There is some historical evidence that helps date Micah's book to the time when these three kings reigned. The children of God were still worshiping God and foreign gods on the high places (cf. Micah 1:5). Corruption and moral decay marked the nation (cf. Micah 2:1-13). These facts point clearly to the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz, when the high places still existed, which is why the nation's social corruption was emphasized in the beginning of Micah's message (cf. 2 Kings 15:35,16:4; 2 Chronicles 28:4,25). Micah prophesied the fall of Samaria (cf. Micah 1:6ff). That would place the message sometime before 722 B.C. The allusion to human sacrifice, where people were going to "*bring their firstborn for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their souls,*" fits into the time of Ahaz, who sacrificed his sons to Moloch (cf. Micah 6:7; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chronicles 28:3). Micah's denunciation of idolatry and the great wickedness caused by idolatry would not have been delivered after the reformation under the good king Hezekiah, which took place about 700 B.C. This places Micah's message sometime between 735 and 700 B.C.

The Historical Background For This Date

Micah was a prophet to the southern nation of Judah as Amos and Hosea had been prophets to the northern nation of Israel. What was it like in Judah between the years of 735-700 B.C.? As in the northern nation of Israel, it was a golden age of prophecy and prosperity in Judah. But it was a black age morally for Judah because of the latter part of Jotham's reign and the entire reign of Ahaz. It was a period of turmoil and strife. It was a period of great change occurring, not only in the

nations of Judah and Israel, but in all the world around them. It was a period of growth, and not all growth was good. They were growing materially and socially, but they were also growing in corruption.

In the year 745 B.C., Tiglath-Pileser III, who is called Pul in the Bible, the king of Assyria, began his re-conquest of the west. Pul was a great king and general. In 738 B.C., just seven years later, his army was in Syria and then at the gates of Samaria, the capital of the northern nation of Israel. Israel and Syria were tired of paying Assyrian taxes, so they pleaded with Egypt for help against Pul. Jotham and Ahaz, for some reason, refused to join this alliance. So the kings of Syria and Israel warred against Ahaz of Judah and defeated him. They sacked and looted the city of Jerusalem. It was a very dark hour for the people of God.

After Ahaz was defeated by Syria and Israel, he called for Tiglath-Pileser to help him. Pul was glad to come. He defeated both of the opposing kings: the king of Syria and the king of Israel (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:1-27). Ahaz was forced to go to Damascus to pay allegiance to Assyria with a large amount of goods. He accepted his place as a puppet king and traveled back home protected as a puppet of Assyria.

The next king of Assyria was Sargon. He came upon the west in 711 B.C. He afflicted terrible judgment upon nearly all of Philistia, Syria, and Israel. Judah, Hezekiah, their king, and the people of Jerusalem were spared. At the death of Sargon in 705 B.C., the young Sennacherib came into power in Assyria. He conquered Egypt, Phoenecia, Philistia, and Judah; but then, they revolted against his control. So Sennacherib came upon the land again and defeated every rebel. Only God's direct intervention saved Hezekiah and Jerusalem.

At that time in the city of Jerusalem, there were some people who wanted to give up and surrender to Assyria. Others wanted to make an allegiance with Egypt. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, and Isaiah, the prophet, pleaded with the people to remain faithful to God. Hezekiah prayed. God sent a destroying

angel. And 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers died in one night. These were stirring times. God was leading His followers. God was gradually working out His great purpose in the world.

Outline of the Book Of Micah

Exile and Restoration

The book of Micah begins with the case against Israel being declared.

Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water running down a slope. All of this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sin of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? (Micah 1:3-5).

The case against Israel was idolatry. There was rampant idolatry, the worship of foreign gods, which Jotham and Ahaz allowed to exist even in the city of Jerusalem.

Micah lamented,

Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself (Micah 1:8-9).

He lamented over Judah's incurable disease. They had wrapped themselves up in idolatry (as Israel did in the books of Amos and Hosea) to the point that they enjoyed being away from God.

Micah 1:10-16 gives the itinerary of judgment. This was

the path that the king of Assyria took as he marched through Israel to the gates of Jerusalem. He started in the north, marched all the way to the south, and finally encamped around the city of Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were called to shave their heads:

Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight. Make yourself as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile (Micah 1:16).

Assyria came down and took all of Israel and Judah, except the city of Jerusalem, captive.

The crime and punishment of Israel and Judah are discussed in Micah 2:1-5. This time it is not the religious corruption of idolatry that made Micah sick to the very core of his being, but it was the oppression and the corruption of the morals of the people.

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds. At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance. Therefore, the LORD says: 'I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: "We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors" (Micah 2:1-5).

These are terrible crimes and sins which the people thought about all night long. They could not even sleep because of the evil that they planned to do. They saw a field, during the night

they coveted it, and when morning came they seized it. They saw a man's house and during the night they planned how they were going to take it. When the day came they took away the man's inheritance that he received when his people crossed the Jordan River with Joshua. God says that He will bring punishment upon them because of that.

Micah had a dispute with the false prophets. He said, “*‘Do not prophesy,’ their prophets say. ‘Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us’*” (Micah 2:6). He says these false prophets were telling him not to prophesy about destruction because it would never happen there. This was the threat that came upon the people because of their religious and moral corruption, and because their false prophets would not tell them the truth.

In Micah 2:12-13 there is the first promise in the book. It is a promise of help to come.

‘I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.’

Micah says all of this evil will one day be corrected when the Lord becomes the shepherd of His flock. They were promised and threatened with an exile because of their sins religiously, morally, and politically. They were also promised a return from that exile. That return was never really promised or given to Israel. God's word to Judah was that some day they would come back to their land.

The Fall And Rise of a Nation

After the exile and restoration, the next event within Micah is the fall and rise of the nation. There is a word against the

princes who are the leaders of the people that involves a threat from God (cf. Micah 3:1-4). Their princes were immoral. They loved evil and did not love good. He accused them of oppressing the poor, even to the point of breaking their bones and eating them. This is probably not a literal action of cannibalism, but it was such extreme oppression that it was like they were chopping them up, putting them in a pot to boil, and then eating them.

Next Micah has a word against the false prophets. They were constantly proclaiming peace in the midst of war when there was no peace. These false prophets thought they deserved to be fed for their preaching. If no one among the ungodly people they were preaching false peace to was willing to take care of them, then they prepared war against them. They were treacherous against the people of God.

Micah declared that he is not that kind of prophet. This is a very important biblical text because it speaks about a true prophet, *“But as for me, I am filled with power with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and with might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin”* (Micah 3:8). What are the characteristics of the true prophet? He is filled with power, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, and filled with justice and might, and he declares their sin to wicked people. These are the characteristics of the true prophet.

Next Micah depicts the sins of the leaders, which was the reason for Jerusalem’s fall.

Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and they say, ‘Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.’ Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a

heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets (Micah 3:9-12).

He tells them that their evil and false worship was the reason for Jerusalem's fall. When people worship God with no heart to obey Him, that is an insult to Him.

Next Micah talked to the people about the exaltation of the house of the Lord (cf. Micah 4:1-4). Jerusalem was going to be plowed under and become a heap with thickets about it. But the house of the Lord will be established on the top of the mountains. This simply means that no matter what happens to the nation, the Lord still intends to fulfill His promise to Abraham, David, and to all the great men of the Old Testament. Micah even made a public confession that they will walk in the way of the Lord and the Lord will be their God (cf. Micah 4:5). God declares that He has a plan for His people (cf. Micah 4:6-10). He plans to reign in judgment and righteousness.

God makes an announcement of victory over the people which will be carried out by the Assyrian siege. There will be a king who will come out of Bethlehem of Judea (cf. Micah 5:2). This will result in a powerful remnant and the destruction of all idolatry (cf. Micah 5:7-9). In spite of their sins, the Messiah will come, the remnant will survive, and idolatry will be destroyed.

Final Indictment, Lament, and Promise

The Lord presents His final case against Israel.

Listen to what the LORD says. 'Stand up, plead your case before the mountains. (The judge is God, the jury is the mountains, and the accused is Israel.) Let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.' For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. 'My people, what have I done to you? How

have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt. Is that why you have turned against me? I redeemed you from the land of slavery. Is that why you hate me? I sent Moses to lead you, and also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD' (Micah 6:1-5).

God presented His case. He had done nothing but good for His people. He challenged them to find one thing among any of His actions that was wrong. Then He waited for their answer.

Micah said that the people wanted to know what God wanted from them.

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Micah 6:6-7).

Micah was saying that the people would give God anything He wanted. They were questioning what He wanted. Was it sacrifices? Was it thousands of rams? Should they have offered their firstborn? He says the people would give God anything. The problem was that they were not really willing to give what God wanted. He wanted more than they were willing to give.

Micah said, “*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6:8). What does the Lord require of you? That is a good question. What does God require of His people today? He requires that they act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. This is

the Lord's essential demand in any covenant.

Micah talked about Jerusalem's sins and the consequences that were the result of those sins (cf. Micah 6:9-16). A final lamentation over Judah's sinfulness is found in Micah 7:1-7. Micah presented a message of hope in the fact that Judah will rise again (cf. Micah 7:8-13). They are brought down because of their religious, political, and moral sins. They are going to rise and return to the land, they are going to rebuild the temple, and things are going to be like they used to be for the nation.

In Micah 7:14-17 there is a final word of prayer and praise from the prophet to the Lord. Micah speaks to God.

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasture lands. Let them feed in Bashan (This is a beautiful pasture land.) and in Gilead as in days of old. As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the Lord our God and will be afraid of you.

Micah was pleading with God to do this for Israel. Then he spoke a final word of faith to express what he thought about God.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

(This is not the shallows where we can find them by walking. It is not in any deep place where you have to put on scuba gear to find your sins. It is beyond the reach of laser beams. It is *“into the depths of the sea.”* That is where our sins will be cast.) *You will be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our Fathers a long time ago*” (Micah 7:18-20).

The book of Micah says that even though Israel (Judah) is now in sin, they will come back to possess the Promised Land.

The Teaching of the Book

Theme, Message, and Comfort

The teachings in Micah have a simple theme because Micah was a simple preacher. The theme is God is a God of ethical righteousness. He wants man's situation to be right with both Him and his fellow man. The message of the book of Micah is God desires pure religion. He wants people to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. The comfort of the book of Micah is that God's requirements are few, simple, and just. Any time someone starts laying out a long list of rules and regulations that God demands, they have not made it simple enough. God gives three simple requirements: act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Permanent Lessons

The permanent lessons of this book are fabulous. **First**, elaborate pretensions of piety and liberal gifts in public cannot atone for a lack of righteousness in the heart. It does not matter how many songs have been sung, how many prayers have been prayed, how many Lord's Suppers have been eaten, or how many sermons have been preached. It does not matter how many poor people have been fed, how many widows have been clothed, or how many orphans have been housed. If the righteousness of God is not in the heart, all the religious acts

are in vain. Pure and undefiled religion before God is loving Him and keeping His commandments (cf. James 1:27; John 14:15-24; 1 John 4:7-21).

Second, Micah teaches that courage comes to those who sense the presence of God in their lives. Micah could stand against all the leaders, priests, and prophets of his day for one simple reason. He knew that God was active in his work and in his life. *“But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin”* (Micah 3:8).

The **third**, and perhaps the best, lesson from Micah is that the unscrupulous use of power, even within the bounds of the law, hurts the law of God. That is the same thing Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 6:10. *“Nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”* It is not enough to be legally correct. The people in Micah’s time were taking the land from widows, the possessions of orphans, and the inheritances from the poor all within the bounds of the law. Sometimes they would bribe the judge, but many times they did not even have to because the poor man could not pay his taxes or his debt. They had every legal right to take away his inheritance from that man and to throw him out to starve. That happened then, it has happened a lot through the years, and it happens even today. The poor man is cast out as if he were nothing. The righteous way to deal with the poor man if he cannot pay his bills would be to at least let him continue to live on his own land, let him serve in some degree, and let him have the dignity of possessing his inheritance that is from God.

The unscrupulous use of power, even when it is within the bounds of law, hurts the heart of God. God wants His poor people cared for. It is true that pure religion is *“. . . to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”* (James 1:27), but pure religion is also to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. This is taking care of the poor of God. This is the heart of God. God is not prejudiced toward the poor, He is

concerned about the poor. Too many times people are more concerned about their own possessions, and they never show any concern for the poor. All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things build up (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:23). Many things may be lawful, but the people of God should not be brought under the power of anything. Believe in God, and find peace in helping the poor of His people.

MICAH, MESSAGE OF HOPE (Part 2)

Introduction

This is the second lesson in the study of the book of Micah. He was a worthy champion of the poor who had the courage and the power to deliver an effective message. Knowing his people so intimately, Micah was able to vividly present the challenge to act justly and consider the poor. His profound sympathy with these oppressed people comes to life in his unforgettable words. His spirit burned with righteous indignation as he saw the rank injustice practiced upon his neighbors and friends. The poor peasants of Judah had a strong champion in this young preacher from the country.

Review of the Book

The date of the book is in the eighth century from 735 to 700 B.C. The outline of the book had three simple points. There was an exile to come, but a restoration would follow. There was a fall that Judah must endure, but they would rise back to glory. There was an indictment because of their sins, but there was the promise that they would be back in the land as the wise, productive people of God. The theme of the book is God's ethical righteousness. God is a God not only of love and justice, but of ethics. The comfort of the book is that God's requirements are few, simple, and just. The message of the book is God's desire for pure religion: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. God's simple

requirements from that message are that His people obey God in a simple, pure and moral way by caring for the poor.

Some Special Studies From The Book

The rest of this chapter is going to cover specific areas of study within the book of Micah. There are seven different areas of special studies to look at.

Social Conditions In Judah

First, notice the social conditions in Judah. There was corruption in the way that they administered justice in their courts.

They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them. They defraud a man in his house, a fellow man of his inheritance (Micah 2:2). . . . Listen you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and eat the flesh from their bones; (Micah 3:1-2).

Their judges were greedy, and they abused the people as they tried to satisfy their greed. Their religious leaders were greedy as well. The priests and the prophets were sinful.

Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price. Her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No disaster shall come upon us' (Micah 3:9-11).

The people were teaching God's word for only one reason — the money that they could get out of it. The entire nation was a sinful nation full of greed and cruelty.

Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe of those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy (Micah 2:8-10).

They were a sinful, wicked, greedy people socially and morally.

Religious Conditions In Judah

Second, there needs to be a review here of the religious conditions in the nation of Judah. *"If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he should be the prophet of this people!"* (Micah 2:11). The prophets who would preach that they could go on with their immoral ways were the prophets that they would hire. The land was full of soothsaying, witchcraft, and superstition. Idolatry predominated. *"Therefore, night will come over you, without visions, and darkness without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them"* (Micah 3:6-7). The land was wicked socially and morally. This was the social and religious condition for that day.

The Sins of the Time

The sins of Judah during this time are the **third** area of study in this chapter. Judah's sins were remarkably like Israel's. It appears that the older brother, Judah, had learned all the wickedness of the land from the younger brother, Israel. They

were full of oppression of the poor (cf. Micah 2:2; 3:1-4). They stayed awake at night planning the oppression that they would bring upon the poor the next day. They used their God-given legitimate power in an unscrupulous and ungodly way. (Remember one of the permanent lessons to be learned from this book is that the unscrupulous use of power, even when it is within the bounds of legality, hurts the heart of God.) They had no personal integrity. They would say one thing and mean something else. They lied to each other. There was a reckless scorn of religion, and they mocked the Sabbath day. They mocked the will and the way of God. They still fulfilled legally to the letter what God wanted done, but they scornfully did so. And finally, they followed the law outside the bounds of their heart.

A lesson that every prophet from the eighth century taught was that outward religion given to God, with no inward desire to serve Him, is offensive to God. It is not only dis-pleasing, it is even offensive to God. God hates an outward show that does not involve the heart.

Judah's prophets were false and immoral prophets.

This is what the LORD says: 'As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them they proclaim "peace"; if he does not, they prepare war against him' (Micah 3:5).

They had the best prophets money could buy. "*The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God*" (Micah 3:7). God does not do what the prophets say God will do, so that brings shame upon the prophets.

And then, last of all, there was the sin of greed within the element of the nation. Greed was not just a social condition, it was also within the church and the state. Greed is idolatry, as Paul told the Colossians (cf. Colossians 3:5). Micah asked, "What is the sin of Israel?" "*All of **this*** (Micah is talking about

all of the judgment that has been brought upon Judah.) *is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? (Samaria is the capital city.) What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?"* (Micah 1:5). Even in the capital city, where the political leaders were found, where the social leaders were found, where the religious leaders were found, and where worship should have been at its highest, it was corrupt to the core. Israel's sin was at the very heart of their land.

Micah's Quartet Of Evil-Doers

The **fourth** area of special topics in the book of Micah is his quartet of evil-doers. He saw four types of people primarily as the reason for the nation's fall. The **first** type of people were the greedy land-grabbers (cf. Micah 2:1-2,9; 7:5-7). They planned their sin by staying awake at night planning how to steal from the poor and from the widowed. They were so hungry for land that they even panted after the dust on the top of a man's head. They wanted all the land whether it was available or not. These people were like the man who asked, "Just how much land would it take to make you happy?" He said, "Just all the land touching mine." That meant that he would never end up happy until he possessed all the world, and then he would be unhappy that there was no more world to possess. The greedy land-grabbers were one of the reasons for Israel's fall.

The **second** type of people were the power-hungry rulers who hated good and loved the evil (cf. Micah 3:1-4). They took bribes (cf. Micah 7:3) and were compared to cannibals who chopped people up and put them in pots and boiled them and ate them (cf. Micah 3:3). They were hungry for the power to rule, so they would make evil good and good evil. They would take bribes and abuse people. They would do anything they had to do to rule. They were like people today who are climbing over each other trying to get to the top of some company or some political system.

The **third** type of people were the hireling false prophets. They were the men who divined for money and made war against anyone who opposed them and would not pay them (cf. Micah 3:5,11). The practice of divining was wrong in the first place, and these prophets were supposed to be speaking the word and the will of God. In this case they would say anything they were paid to say. They were prophesying of wine and of beer and of strong drink and saying, "You can do what you want to do and live like you want to live." They lived as if God did not care as long as they were being paid. That was all that mattered to them.

And then the **fourth** type in the group of people were the priests who taught for hire (cf. Micah 3:11). The rich, the rulers, the proclaimers, and the religious teachers were leading the people in oppressing the poor. They were also deceiving the people into believing that everything they were doing was all right. These four types of people were Micah's picture of the evil-doers.

Micah's Picture of God

The **fifth** area of special topics is Micah's picture of God. God is the judge who is going to come to judge all that has happened.

Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. . . . 'Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations' (Micah 1:3-6).

God is the judge.

The main thing Micah says about God is God is ethically righteous. Every time he presents the immorality of the people (cf. Micah 2:1-2, 3:1-11, 6:6, 7:2), and every time he presents the evil of the people, he presents God as the opposite of their

evilness for God is righteous. The God of Micah is an ethical, righteous judge.

The God of Micah loves peace (cf. Micah 4:3). God will establish a kingdom of peace where He will reign as the King of peace (cf. Micah 5:5). There will be a kingdom of peace ruled by a King of peace because God is a God that loves peace.

God is a God in the book of Micah that gives hope and promise (Micah 7:18-20). He not only will take away their sins, but He will put their sins into the uttermost part of the sea.

The God of the book of Micah is a God that will reach the world from Mount Zion (cf. Micah 4:1-5). His word will go forth from Zion. The Law will go forth from Jerusalem. The God of Micah is a God that all men would want to have to be their God. These are the pictures of God that Micah paints for the people of Judah.

Micah's Picture of the Kingdom

The **sixth** special area of study in the book of Micah is one of the Kingdom of God (cf. Micah 4:1-18).

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of

their gods; we will walk in the name our LORD our God for ever and ever (Micah 4:1-5).

In that day, declares the LORD, 'I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come upon the Daughter of Jerusalem' (Micah 4:6-8).

Notice briefly the ten things that Micah has to say about the kingdom here.

Number one, its exaltation. The kingdom is not only going to be above just the nation of Judah, it is going to be above all the nations of this world.

Number two, its extent. Look at the size of this kingdom. How many people will come? "*Peoples*" from afar off will stream into this city.

Number three, its standard will be His standard. They will learn His way. They will learn the Lord's path. His standard will become theirs.

Number four, its commission will go forth from Zion as the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. Of course, this speaks of the day of Pentecost and onward when the word of God went out from "*Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth*" (cf. Acts 1:7-8; 2:1-11).

Number five, its power will judge between many nations and settle disputes for strong empires. The kingdom of God, when it came, would rule the entire world.

Number six, its plan. They will take all the war instruments, and they will make them into farm tools. Of course, this is not speaking literally. It says that all of the war-like characteristics of man, all of the things that make him want

to conquer, destroy, and oppress others, will be changed into a spirit and a desire that wants to help, wants to feed, and that does not intend to control.

Number seven, notice its peace. There will be a great supply of peace because every man will sit under his vine and every man will sit under his fig tree. There will be solace in this kingdom and no fear. The vine and fig tree are not all that significant to today's Christians, but to the Jew they were extremely significant. If the Jew had the vine to get his juice and the fig to get his fruit, then he could live forever right there under his own vine and fig tree. He was content to live in his own small house and tend his own small plot of land. There would be all he needed to survive, and there would be peace, comfort, and solace.

Number eight, notice its faith: "*All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever*" (Micah 4:5). There are two key words in this verse: walk and name. The phrase, "*We will walk in the name of the LORD our God . . .*" means that they would make their progress in the name of the Lord. That could mean either one of two things, or perhaps both. They will be walking as one of God's possessions who had been named by God. Or they will be walking by the authority and the strength of God which is in His name. Christians belong to God, and that is the reason they walk. Christians are helped by God, and this is also the reason they walk. Christians belong to the King, and they are helped by the King as they walk for the King.

Number nine, notice its strength. It says the Lord will gather them, but the Lord will rule over them. They will no longer be ruled by kings that desire something other than their good. They will no longer be ruled by a prophet or priests who desire something other than their good. They will be ruled by the Lord who at the cross will show, "I am only concerned with your good, not mine."

Number ten, notice its glory. The former dominion, which would be the one that was David's, shall return; and the

daughter of Israel, which is Jerusalem or Zion, will have the kingship over the kingdom of God forever and ever. The Law will not only go out from Zion, but the people of God will rule from Zion.

Micah's Picture Of The King

The **seventh** special area of study in the book of Micah is the King (cf. Micah 5:2-9). Micah says that the King will be born in Bethlehem.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

The King will not come from the fabulous city of Jerusalem. He will come from this little village of Bethlehem to teach that God does not look as man looks.

Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace. When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men. They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he invades our land and marches into our borders. The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for man nor linger for mankind. The remnant of Jacob will be among the

nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes and no one can rescue. Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed (Micah 5:3-9).

Notice this One lacks an origin because He is eternal. His work in Israel is to shepherd God's flock. The peace that He brings to Israel is that none of their future enemies will be able to destroy them or overcome them. His provision to Israel is that they will be like refreshing dew, showering rain, or a triumphant lion to the world. This is the picture of the King. This is the text that the rulers or the teachers of Israel used to tell Herod where the Messiah (Jesus) would be born. The book of Micah is a book that really centers on telling the poor of their victory that is to come.

Other's Quotations of Micah

Micah is quoted in a few other books, and this is a good time to look at those quotations. Jeremiah was in terrible trouble, and the people of Judah were going to condemn him and kill him for saying that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. The elders of the land stepped forth and told the people that Jeremiah “ . . . *has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God*” (Jeremiah 26:16b). Then they quoted from Micah 3:12, “ *‘Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets’*” (Jeremiah 26:18b). Micah had said just what Jeremiah was saying, but he said it in the eighth century. The people could not kill Jeremiah for saying exactly what God had already said, so Jeremiah's life was spared.

In Matthew 2:5-6 the wise men came from the east looking for Jesus. They asked Herod, “ . . . *where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?*” (Matthew 2:2). Herod asked the teachers of Israel, and they said “*In Bethlehem in Judah, . . . for*

this is what the prophet has written” (Matthew 2:5). The teachers of the law quoted Micah 5:2. This was what led the wise men to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. Jesus quoted Micah 7:6, which says a man’s enemies will be those of his own household, to prepare his apostles for the persecution that was to come (cf. Matthew 10:35-36).

Conclusion: The Nature of True Religion

The last lesson from the book of Micah is called “the golden rule of the Old Testament.” The people wanted to know what God expected of them. They did not believe that they were going to be able to buy the favor of God for a penance. They were willing to give God thousands of rams or even thousand of rivers of oil. They were even willing to give God their first born sons, the fruit of their bodies, for the sin of their souls (cf. Micah 6:6-7). Would not all of that be enough work and deeds to appease God? They needed to remember that David said God does not delight in sacrifices and offerings (cf. Psalm 51:16-17). David was the shepherd king and he surely had plenty of sheep to offer. God does not want works of sacrifice. In Micah 6:8, Micah summarizes his three great contemporaries: Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. What does God want? *“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

He says the first thing that God required is to “*act justly.*” That is to be sure their actions were right. Amos also emphasized that God was a God who wanted His people to do what was right. That was what Micah was saying. The first thing that God required was that they live a basically moral life by doing what was right. The second thing that Micah said was that God wanted them to “*love mercy.*” Hosea had two favorite words that summarize his book: love and mercy. Jesus also preached about these actions and attributes through out His

work. Hosea and Jesus both preached that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. The word love means “to delight in.” God wants His children to delight in showing mercy.

The last point in this golden rule is that God required that they “*walk humbly with your God.*” This was also Isaiah’s message throughout his whole book (cf. Isaiah 1-66). God wants people to serve Him humbly. The very first thing that Jesus said publicly was, “*Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3). And the mourner and the merciful are blessed as well in the sight of God. Jesus started his ministry with Isaiah’s and Micah’s emphasis. People are to live or walk humbly with God. These sound like simple requirements, but they are sometimes hard to fulfill. It is so hard to live that humble, simple life because of man’s selfishness, his pride, and his desire for things. It is hard to live the simple life because of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. But please, please remember that this is all that God requires: to do justly — that is rightness toward yourself; to love mercy — that is faithfulness and kindness toward others; and to walk humbly before God — that is worship to Jehovah. In and out and up, all that God requires is the simple life that loves Him, that loves His people, and that loves the poor. Remember that and in remembering, find the peace that it brought to Micah in his desert place.

ZEPHANIAH

Introduction

Chapter fifteen covers the study of the book of Zephaniah. Zephaniah was a seventh century prophet prophesying during the time of 630-625 B.C. The **nation of Israel** had fallen, and only the nation of Judah existed.

The Historical Background of Zephaniah

The Long Reign Of Hezekiah's Wicked Son Manasseh

The long reign of Hezekiah's wicked son Manasseh, who reigned from 687-642 B.C., reversed whatever good Hezekiah had accomplished in his reforms and his attempt to make Israel the religious center of the universe again. Manasseh sought to survive in his world of turmoil by becoming pro-Assyrian in his politics and making alliances with Assyria. As a matter of fact, he was the puppet king of Assyria.

Prophetic Witness During Manasseh's Reign

The prophets did not want to allow this. They knew that the only way to survive was to have absolute trust in God. God raised Zephaniah as a prophet to say, "Do not trust in the arm of the flesh. Do not trust in horses and chariots. Do not trust in your alliances with Assyria. Trust in Jehovah, as Hezekiah had done." In the historical narrative of Manasseh's reign, there are recorded times when the prophets, as the servants of the Lord, cried out against the evil that Manasseh was bringing into the country of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 21:10-15; 2 Chronicles 23:10). As usual the people, the king and, the priests would not heed

the prophetic message. So Judah continued its plunge into apostasy and destruction.

Manasseh Carried Off To Babylon

God, in his marvelous grace, had the king of Assyria bind Manasseh, put a hook in his nose, and carry him away to Babylon. There in prison Manasseh turned to the Lord, humbled himself, and called on the Lord for deliverance. The Lord heard his cry. God has heard His children's cry over and over again. The Father is always at the window looking for the prodigal on the horizon. And when Manasseh repented, there was a ring on his finger, a robe on his back, and shoes on his feet. He was back in his home land eating the fatted calf as the returned son.

Manasseh Removed the Foreign Idols

Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh did his best to undo the wrong he had done. He removed all of the foreign gods. He removed the image, whatever it was, of some foreign god from the temple of the Lord. He restored the altar of the Lord. He sacrificed fellowship and thank offerings unto the Lord on that altar. And he went throughout all the land and commanded that Judah would worship only God.

Sacrifice To Idols Continued

Judah did put away all of their idolatry for a little while. But while worshiping only God, they continued to sacrifice at the high places. They did not offer all of their sacrifices in Jerusalem as the law said to do. They worshiped God, but they did not worship Him as He wanted to be worshiped. This confusion of the worship of the Lord and that of Baal is seen in Zephaniah 1:4-5,

I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests — .

Amon Re-Instituted the Idolatrous Practices

Amon, who followed his father Manasseh to Judah's throne, re-instituted all the religious atrocities his father had tried to remove. He had learned too well from the early days of his father. Amon's reign was short, but it re-instituted into the land all of the evil of Baal worship with its ungodly materialism and sexual immorality.

Josiah, Last Good King of Judah

Josiah, the son of Amon was the last good king Judah ever knew. He came to the throne at the age of eight. He sought God actively at the age of fifteen. He began to reform the land of all that his father Amon had re-instituted at age 20, and he completed that reformation at age 26. Zephaniah prophesied during the latter part of Josiah's reign, because Zephaniah speaks of the remnant of Baal and of the king's sons. Josiah, a great king, was killed by Pharaoh-Neco at Megiddo in his one act of rebellion against God. This was the only time he did not inquire of God as to what he was to do (cf. 2 Kings 22:1-23:30).

The Prophet Zephaniah

The prophet Zephaniah's name means "he who Jehovah hides or protects". His name is prophetic since he was going to be speaking of the protection of a remnant in the trials and judgment to come.

His Ancestry and Family

In the first verse of this book, he traced his ancestry back four generations to Hezekiah. Most prophets would only speak of their father, some of their grandfather, but he went back four generations to Hezekiah. It is possible that he wanted to establish a link to the only other good king that anyone in Judah would have remembered. Therefore he was of royal ancestry.

He was not of peasant lineage as Amos, Hosea, and Micah had been. He was like Isaiah. He was welcome at the royal palace.

His Home

The prophet lived in Judah. He probably even lived in Jerusalem, and he may have been a part of the palace court. At least he had a right to be since he was of royal lineage. Perhaps his ministry even encouraged Josiah's reforms of 2 Chronicles 34:1-7. This makes sense because Josiah, as a great king, would need the encouragement of the man of God telling him constantly that he was doing the will of God. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and also of Nahum.

The Date of the Book

During The Reign of Josiah and After Josiah's Reforms

Josiah's reign was from 639-608 B.C. The date of this book is probably at the latter part of Josiah's reform which means he would have written it sometime around the year 620 B.C. It was possibly after Josiah's reforms because of the mention of the remnant of Baal (cf. Zephaniah 1:4). If he had written early in Josiah's life, Baal would not have been a remnant; earlier the god Baal basically ruled the land.

They did not marry early in those days, and in chapter 1:8 Zephaniah says, "*On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes.*" So Josiah was old enough not just to have a son, but to have sons that were worthy of judgment. That was a sad commentary on the fact that evil companionship corrupts good morals. Here was Josiah, the best of the kings of Judah, and yet his sons were following the wickedness of the time. They would have to be judged with the people that had brought idolatry into the land.

The Outline of the Book

The study of the outline of this book gives a bird's eye view of Zephaniah, rather than trying to study the book as a whole portion. The important thing to see is what God says. Zephaniah really talks about two specific things that God has to say. He talks about the judgment of the day of the Lord in chapters 1 and 2 and the salvation of the day of the Lord in chapter 3.

The Judgment of the Day of the Lord

The first verse of Zephaniah gives the background of the prophet.

The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah.

Zephaniah was saying, "I am speaking from the aspect of one that has seen it from the king's court. I've seen this land go corrupt, not from a peasant's view, but from the view of the palace." That was a good view to be speaking from. Amos, Hosea, and Micah tell the street view of God's judgment upon His people. This view was from the king's palace — from the royal house. He says, "Here's how I have seen the downfall of my people from the royal house.

Zephaniah describes the day of Jehovah, the day of the Lord, and the day of judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Zephaniah 1:2-2:3). **First**, it was a day of total destruction.

'I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,' declares the LORD. 'I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea. (This is not literal. He simply says this judgment is a total destruction that is

going to come upon Judah and upon Jerusalem.) *The wicked will have only heaps of rubble, when I will cut off man from the face of the earth, ' declares the LORD (Zephaniah 1:2-3).*

Second, if God is going to come in such fierce judgment, there had to be good reasons. He gave adequate cause in the next verses.

'I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, the name of the pagan and the idolatrous priests — those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech, those who turn away from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire after him. Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; . . . I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit' (Zephaniah 1:4-9).

He was judging them because of their religious apostasy, their idolatry, their social and religious corruption. **Third**, the day of the Lord was going to be a terrible day.

'On that day,' declares the LORD, 'a cry will come up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. Wail, you who live in the market districts; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be ruined. At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, . . . ' (Zephaniah 1:10-12a).

God was going to search the entire city, and lamentation was demanded. The judgment was then described by Zephaniah.

'The great day of the LORD is near — near and coming quickly. Listen! The day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry. . .they will walk like blind men. . . Their blood will be poured out like dust . . . Neither their silver nor gold will be able to save them . . . In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth' (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

All of Judah's world was about to be judged, because they worshiped the Baal gods, they refused to listen to the prophets of God, they oppressed the poor, and they were involved in greed. These are the reasons for Judah's fall. These were the same reasons Amos and Hosea had given for the fall of Israel, and the same reasons Micah had prophesied about the fall of Judah. And now less than forty years before Judah fell, Zephaniah was saying judgment was about to come.

In Zephaniah 2:4-15, the day of Jehovah upon the nations is described. If God was going to judge His house, He was going to judge the nations. He judged Philistia to the west (cf. Zephaniah 2:4-7). He judged Moab and Ammon to the east (cf. Zephaniah 2:8-11). He judged Ethiopia to the south (cf. Zephaniah 2:12). He judged Assyria to the north (cf. Zephaniah 2:13-15). Assyria was that proud empire that thought that it was a queen and would never fall. Assyria ruled at the time Zephaniah spoke. God was bringing judgment upon His city, His nation, and His own people, so one could count on Him bringing judgment upon the whole world. He was going to

judge any and all of their enemies for the enemies had touched Judah, and Judah was the apple of His eye. Those who touched the apple of God's eye would be judged.

The Salvation of the Day of the Lord

Zephaniah turns from the "judgment of the day of the Lord" to declare and to discuss the "salvation of the day of the Lord." First he discusses Jerusalem's sinfulness and contrasts it with the Lord's righteousness.

Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God. Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law (Zephaniah 3:1-4).

This was Jerusalem, the city of God, that he was talking about. Three words describe Jerusalem: oppressing, rebellious, and defiled. They were also wicked, immoral, apostate, and cruel to each other. How is the Lord in this situation?

The LORD within her is righteous; he does not wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame (Zephaniah 3:5).

Jeremiah, Zephaniah's contemporary, quoted God as saying, "I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them" (Jeremiah 7:25 KJV). God proved His righteousness by bringing into their life every morning the prophets of God. He condemned their leaders, their priests, and their prophets; and then He contrasted them with Himself by saying, "I have done absolutely nothing wrong. I will come in

judgment, and My judgment will be just.”

After Zephaniah contrasts Jerusalem’s sinfulness and the Lord’s righteousness, he told the people about the purpose of the judgment that was to come (cf. Zephaniah 3: 8 - 20). God brought all this judgment, not simply to punish the wicked, but for the salvation and the restoration of anybody that could be saved or anybody that could be restored. He talked about the remnant of the nations that He wanted to save.

‘Therefore wait for me,’ declares the LORD, ‘for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them — all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger. Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush (That is Ethiopia to the south.) my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day you will not be put to shame’ (Zephaniah 3:8-11a).

God said “I will even save a remnant of the nations. Judgment is coming upon the nations in order that I might call out from them even to the far south lands of Ethiopia. That I might call out from them a people that will honor My name with one lip and one voice. I will call out a people that will honor My name with one shoulder and one service. They will put their mouth to My word. They will put their shoulder to My will. They will build in My kingdom.” Judgment came upon the nations for salvation and restoration. But judgment came upon the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem for what purpose?

‘On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never

again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid' (Zephaniah 3:11-13).

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:3-5). That was what God is telling Israel. “I will save a remnant that will possess the world.”

God through Zephaniah talks about the kingdom in the remainder of his book (cf. Zephaniah 3:14-20). He says very simply that this kingdom would be a place where God would be honored by the lame and the crippled that He had gathered there. Those that the world had rejected, God would accept into His kingdom, and they would rule the whole world.

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message and Its Comfort

The theme of the book of Zephaniah is that the day of Jehovah is near for all the world. The day of the Lord is a day of final judgment upon the wicked nation and the wicked city. The message this book teaches is the same as the book of Jonah — Jehovah is the God of all the universe. Nobody escapes the judgment of God. He rules the entire world. In the midst of these statements of trials, the comfort this book offers is that all that God has done, and does now, and all that He will ever do is for the salvation of a remnant from the nations and a remnant of Israel.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are three lessons to be learned from the book of Zephaniah. **Number one**, Man becomes like the God he

worships. If man worships a god that is immoral, he will become immoral. If man worships a god that is power-hungry, he will become power-hungry. If man worships a god that is cruel, he will become cruel. If man worships a God who is loving, then man will become loving and lovable. If man worships a God that brings peace, man will bring peace. If man worships a God that is full of hope, man will also be full of hope. Men need to be careful what they make ultimate in their lives, for their lives will become like it.

Number two, earnest warning is needed to draw people back to God. In spite of all Josiah's reforms, they still needed Zephaniah's preaching to bring them back to the Lord. **Number three**, put emphasis on the spiritual nature of the kingdom. The brick and mortar, the works that are done, the sermons that are preached, and the songs that are sung are not what makes up the kingdom of God. Man needs to remember to put emphasis on the One that he sings to, on the One that he serves, on the spiritual, hidden, secret nature of the church, and on the fact that it is the kingdom of God.

Some Special Studies From the Book

The Sins of Judah

Zephaniah is a simple book and with simple lessons. The **first** study talks about the sins of Judah. Zephaniah through God named seven specific sins that they would be judged for. **Number one** is religious syncretism. They were using a mixture of different kinds of religious practices (cf. Zephaniah 1:4-5). There was a remnant of Baal left in the land. They were worshipping the stars of the heavens as well as Jehovah. They were worshipping Baal and Molech. They were worshipping anything that seemed powerful to them.

Number two, they were wearing foreign apparel (cf. Zephaniah 1:8). The law had stipulated certain apparel for certain tribes, and they were not even to have certain kinds of

fringes on their borders because that would make them look like the Gentiles they lived among. And if they looked like them, it would not be long until they acted like them.

Robbery was the **number three** sin listed for Israel (cf. Zephaniah 1:9). God said they “ . . . *avoid stepping over the threshold*, . . . ” That means they were not entering the house by the door, but they were going in the window. They were doing this to be able to rob each other.

Number four was the fraud and violence that characterized their life (cf. Zephaniah 1:9). **Number five** was the fact that they had violent, wanton, and lustful leaders (cf. Zephaniah 3:3-4). Their leaders not only made war against them, they robbed them in order to live lustfully. **Number six** they considered God to be indifferent to what was going on (cf. Zephaniah 1:12). He says that the people thought “*the LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.*” They said, “The Lord does not see what I do. He does not care. I can do anything I want to.” They thought that God was not going to bring any judgment. And so, **number seven**, they refused to receive correction. These were the sins in the nation of Judah.

Description of the Messiah’s Kingdom

The **second** study is a description of the Messiah’s kingdom in Zephaniah 3:9-20. This kingdom would come from all nations, and they would have one lip and one purpose. That is what Paul said in Ephesians 2:11-22. God has made the Jew and the Gentile one new man in Christ and reconciled them so that they are in fellowship with one another again.

God says this kingdom would be restored from all its captivity (cf. Zephaniah 3:11-13). It would be cleansed from all of its sin and sanctified. It would be set holy and pure before its God. And that is exactly what Paul said about the church in Corinth, even though the church there was so confused and divided. They . . .

. . . will inherit the kingdom of God. . . you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the LORD Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:10-11).

The main thing that he had to say about the kingdom was that it would be comforted and exalted (cf. Zephaniah 3:14-20). He said they could sing and be glad because the Lord had taken away their punishment. On that day when he took away the punishment . . .

. . . they will say to Jerusalem, Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing. The sorrow for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the people of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes (Zephaniah 3:16-20).

God says, in the coming kingdom, everyone that has been oppressed and put to dishonor and lameness by the people of the world will be honored. There are many New Testament passages that give this same comfort.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (1 Peter 5:10).

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God was telling the poor, persecuted, and lame saints in Zephaniah's day that someday they would be the glory of God. That is what He has in mind today for the poor in spirit who are the church. They are the kingdom of God, they are in Christ Jesus, and they are the glory of God. This was to be a comfort to the people of Zephaniah's day. Believing in this can bring peace and hope to the saints of today as well.

NAHUM

Introduction

This chapter will cover the book of Nahum. Jonah would have loved to have been there to hear Nahum preach because Nahum is one final “at last.” “At last” the city of Nineveh and the nation of Assyria would be destroyed.

Historical Background — Assyrian Kings

Looking at the historical background will help to understand the book of Nahum. The books that are considered the Minor Prophets were not written in a vacuum. They were written as a part of the history of the day in which they happened. The kings of Assyria are an important part of that history. **Tiglath-Pileser III** (he is also called Pul in the Bible) reigned over Assyria from 747 to 727 B.C. He deported some of the citizens of Northern Israel when he came down. They surrendered to him even though he did not destroy the city of Samaria, and he carried some of the citizens of Israel back to Assyria. **Shalmaneser V** ruled from 727 to 722 B.C. He began the siege on the city of Samaria when Israel rebelled against Assyria. He came to destroy the city of Samaria, but somehow died during the siege. **Sargon II**, who reigned from 722 to 705 B.C. over Assyria, finished the siege of Samaria, destroyed the city, and sowed salt into the hill upon which the city was built, so that no one would be able to grow anything there for years. He was murdered in his palace during the year 705 B.C.

Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, reigned from 705 to 681 B.C. He was the king that came back into the land to try to

conquer all of the country of Judah. He would have accomplished this deed if not for God's intervention. In his annals in the British Museum in London, he boasts that he shut up Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage." But the next portion of the reading only tells that Sennacherib was back in the city of Nineveh counting his stolen goods. For every other city that he attacked he would say, "I destroyed them and killed their king, or I put a hook in the nose of their king and carried him back to Assyria." But in this case all he said was, "I shut up Hezekiah like a bird in the cage." And then he was back in the city of Nineveh and gave the account of looking at what he had captured. Sennacherib did not give an account of what really happened, but the books of Isaiah and 2 Chronicles do (cf. 2 Chronicles 32:1-23; Isaiah 36:37:38). Isaiah was preaching for God and Hezekiah was praying to God. Hezekiah stood firm against Sennacherib, so God sent a destroying angel into Sennacherib's camp one night. When Sennacherib woke up the next day, there were 185,000 of his chief soldiers dead. He returned to Nineveh with a defeated army. Hezekiah and the men of Judah had not shot an arrow, thrown a spear or even thrown a stone. The victory was all because of God. Later two of his own sons killed Sennacherib in 681 B.C., and another son, named **Esarhadden**, took the throne. Very little is known about Esarhadden except that his reign lasted from 681 to 622 B.C.

The next king of Assyria was **Assur-bani-pal**. All that is known about him is that he was a very cruel king, and he destroyed No-Amon in the country of Egypt (cf. Nahum 3:8). He ruled from 668 to 625 B.C. Next came an insignificant king named **Assur-ital-ilani**. He ruled from 625 to 620 B.C. **Esarhaddon III** was the next king to reign. He ruled from 620 to 612 B.C., and he saw his nation fall to Babylon. Esarhaddon, his wives, his children, and all of his wealth were gathered into the palace, and fire was set to it by the Babylonian army. This was the day in which Nahum spoke.

Characteristics of Nineveh and Assyria

The natures of Nineveh and the nation of Assyria are also important to the study of Nahum. Farrar wrote a history of Assyria and about this empire. He said there has never been a nation more fierce, more cruel, or more proud that marched across the pages of history than the nation of Assyria. They boasted how when they fought battles, they strewed the countryside with the corpses of their enemies. They ripped the hearts out of the kings and the princes and put their bodies on stakes and set fire to them. They would cook the hearts over the fire of the kings that they had destroyed. They put hooks into the noses and the flesh of the people that they conquered and pulled them back to Assyria. Of course, the enemies fought this treatment, and their flesh would rip away, but the Assyrians would just put the hook in a place where it had not been before. There has never been a nation that deserved to be destroyed more than the nation of Assyria. This was the nation that had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but now one hundred or two hundred years later, this nation was going to be destroyed.

Nature of the Book

It is important to understand that this was written in a day when dictators were seeking to run ruthlessly over the earth. That is why the prophet Nahum has a particular freshness and such meaning. He says that vengeance still belongs to God. Such monstrous disregard of God and His righteous standards will bring swift and certain judgment. Remember that any nation that deliberately sets itself up in defiance of God and any nation that deliberately sets itself up to trample upon innocent people must feel the terrible touch of the divine hand. God is righteous. He may come slowly, but He comes surely. His mill may not grind as quickly as someone would like for it to grind, but it grinds exceedingly small. Assyria was an object lesson of the need for people to know that personal, civic, and national righteousness alone exalt a nation. Sin is a reproach to any people. Solomon said, *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin*

is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Nahum’s book, even though it is one of the shorter ones of the Bible, is a terrific arraignment for a nation that seeks glory by war and oppression. Nahum called the Assyrians into account for their violent deeds. Mark this down and remember it forever: God still hates brutality, violence, and wrong doing. Those who participate in such actions never escape the judgment of our loving, merciful, and yet just God.

The Date of the Book

The date of the book of Nahum is definitely sometime between the year 630 B.C. and the year 612 B.C. That is easy to see because the fall of No-Amon (He is also known as Thebes) in 663 B.C. had already occurred and was a well known historical fact.

Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water all around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall. Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies. Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains (Nahum 3:8-10).

And the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. was still in the future. Nineveh was at the height of her glory, and she began to sink about the year 630 B.C. That puts Nahum between the years of 630 and 612 B.C., at a time when Nineveh still boasted to be a queen that could not be destroyed.

Look at how powerful they are. You have increased the number of your merchants until they are more than the stars of the sky, but like locusts they strip the

land and then fly away. Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle on the walls on a cold day – but when the sun appears they fly away, and no one knows where they are (Nahum 3:16-17).

Nineveh, like Israel in the book of Hosea, thought they were still young, but gray hairs were beginning to be seen upon their head. Their officials were still like locusts in number, but they would soon to fly away when the sun arose to shine upon them. Their people were like the locusts that spread upon the countryside, but they would soon be the stinking corpses that locusts become when they get old.

The Outline of the Book

The outline of the book shows that Nahum is trying to say, “Whew! At last! Nineveh will be destroyed.”

Nineveh’s Doom — Decreed by the Lord

Chapter 1 discusses Nineveh’s doom: “*The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh: . . . I will destroy . . .*” (Nahum 1:14). It was not because Nineveh had become weak. Nineveh would fall at the height of its strength, but Nineveh was doomed because that doom is decreed by the Lord.

First, Nahum speaks of the goodness and the severity of God (cf. Nahum 1:1-8). God comes in vengeance and in anger, but He also comes in mercy. Then he talks about the total destruction of Nineveh (cf. Nahum 1:9-15).

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God. The LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and

great in power. The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. (This is an important statement that needs to be remembered. “The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.”) His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel (These are the most fertile places in the world.) wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. (“The blossoms of Lebanon” are the evergreen fir trees.) The mountains quake before him. The hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him (Nahum 1:2-6).

The description of the day of Jehovah is terrible anger. This is the severe side of the judgment of God. But there is also His mercy in the midst of judgment: *“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, . . . ”* (Nahum 1:7). Here is his mercy in the midst of judgment. It is not in contrast to His judgment and it is not after the judgment is over, but it is right in the middle. How is God while the judgment is going on? *“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, . . . ”* So, He is a refuge for the righteous. He will deliver those who trust in Him out of the very middle of His judgment upon His enemies and theirs. He will deliver the righteous.

Look at His pursuit of His enemies. *“But with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness”* (Nahum 1:8). His mercy is a refuge for the righteous, but his pursuit is the end of the wicked.

Whatever they plot against the LORD he will bring to an end; trouble will not come a second time. They will be entangled among thorns and drunk from their

wine; they will be consumed like dry stubble. From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the LORD and counsels wickedness (Nahum 1:9-11).

God gives the details for the complete and absolute overthrow of Nineveh. Wicked men may plot against the Lord, but the Lord has the last word. God only hits a nation one time. God says, “A wicked king (It is unknown which king this was, possibly Esarhadden.) has made a plot against God and thinks that he is going to defeat God.”

This is what the LORD says: ‘Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and pass away. Although I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away’ (Nahum 1:12-13).

In the midst of all of this total destruction, God says to Judah, “*I will faithfully deliver you, but I will totally destroy Nineveh.*”

The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh. You will have no descendants to bear your name. I will destroy the carved images and cast idols that are in the temple of your Gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are vile (Nahum 1:14).

What a terrible thought to think that God would dig the grave for man because he was so sinful. God says, “I will destroy you. You will have no children. I will take away your idols that you have trusted in, your power that you gloried in, and I will dig your grave, for you are vile.”

What was going to happen to Judah and the city of Jerusalem in the midst of all this destruction? What would God do to them?

Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, (The good news is the fact that Nineveh has fallen.) who proclaims peace! (There will be peace because Nineveh has fallen.) Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed (Nahum 1:15).

God said there was good news from the mountain top — The enemy was dead! Nineveh had been destroyed by the will of God and the decree of God. This was the same Nineveh that was saved when they repented, but now they were going to be destroyed for their wickedness.

Nineveh's Siege — Decreed by the Lord

Chapter two has a picture of the siege of Nineveh before it takes place. And this siege, which was the surrounding of the city, was also decreed by the Lord. Their doom and the siege that leads to their doom were both commanded by the Lord. There was an assault upon the city that was making furious preparation, but resistance was hopeless (cf. Nahum 2:1-7).

An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourself, marshal all your strength. The LORD will restore all the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines. The shields of his soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of pine are brandished. The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning" (Nahum 2:1-4).

This was Nineveh getting ready for the war. They had done

it again and again, so they were sure of victory. They got out all their chariots, spears, and horses. They put on their armor, and the women are probably singing songs about past victories, while the men were drinking their wine and getting ready for the battle that they were going to have against whomever is stupid enough to come and attack their city. These were preparations that they had made many times before for a victory, but this time all that preparation was hopeless. All the resistance that they would make against the approaching enemy was absolutely a useless thing.

He summons his picked troops, yet they stumble on their way. They dash to the city wall; their protective shield is put in place. The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. It is decreed (This is why resistance is hopeless, because it has already been decreed.) that the city be exiled and carried away. Its slave girls moan like doves and beat upon their breasts. Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away. 'Stop! Stop!' they cry, but no one turns back. Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures! She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale (Nahum 2:5-10).

This is a description of the queen city being captured. This was the city that said, "I am a queen and cannot be a widow." Here is the descriptive cry of the enemy. What happened to this queen who said, "I cannot be harmed?" She was pillaged, plundered, and stripped. This queen who had boasted, "I cannot fall. I will protect any that serve me from all of their enemies." But not only was the queen captured, so were her children

Where now is the lions' den, the place where they fed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the

cubs, with nothing to fear? The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey (Nahum 2:11-12).

The lion that was Nineveh was killed. The queen had been captured, and the army had been defeated.

‘I’m against you,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voice of your messengers will no longer be heard’ (Nahum 2:13).

When they had surrounded the city of Jerusalem, Sennacherib sent a messenger to the wall to tell Jerusalem, “I have defeated all of the cities before you, and I will defeat you, too. You cannot resist my king. Surrender! Give up!” But after this, no more would any messenger go out before the armies of Nineveh. This siege would be the end of the city of Nineveh. In spite of all their preparation, in spite of all their queen’s adultery, in spite of all their lions’ devouring, and in spite of all their army’s swords, it was decreed by the Lord that the siege would bring the end of the city of Nineveh.

Nineveh’s Sins — Condemned by the Lord

The book of Nahum tells the doom, the siege, and the sin of Nineveh. Chapter three covers the sins of Nineveh. The sin was the reason for the doom. The sin was the reason the siege of Nineveh is successful and victorious. These sins were not decreed by the Lord, sin is never decreed by the Lord; sin is condemned by the Lord. Their doom was decreed and their siege was decreed because their sins were condemned.

Nineveh is discussed, as well as the punishment for their sins, in the first verses of chapter three.

Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of the whip, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses — all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and people by her witchcraft (Nahum 3:1-4).

These verses give the discussion of the nature of their fall as well as the reason for that fall. The wicked empire of Rome is described with these very words in the book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 17:1-2). Nineveh was called “the powerful harlot of her day” just as Rome was the harlot of John’s day.

God repeats what He has already told them, “*I am against you, declares the LORD Almighty. I will lift your skirts from off your face. I will show the nations your nakedness*” (Nahum 3:5). He told them they would have the same fate as No-Amon (Thebes) had (cf. Nahum 3: 8- 11). Their riches would not be able to save them (cf. Nahum 3: 12 -19). All of their outlying strongholds would fall. The siege would surround the city, and it will fall. What did the world do? “. . . *Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?*” (Nahum 3:19). There is rejoicing at the fall of the nation.

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, and Its Comfort

The theme is a simple theme and is a sum of all that Nahum is trying to say. “Nineveh is doomed.” is the theme for this book. Nineveh — that prostitute of a queen that raped all the world and seduced all the kings and great men of the world,

that Nineveh that Jonah had saved by his preaching, was doomed because of its sin and lack of repentance in their day. The message of this book to Israel and to Nineveh is that they were both doomed. This message was not preached to Nineveh but to the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The message for them was that God still rules the world. No matter what things might appear, God was and still is in control. It may look like the world is out of control. Man is the one who is out of control not the world. God is still in control of his universe.

Right in the middle of the universe is a throne, and on that throne sits the Creator. And He sits there by virtue of His creating ability. And right in the center of that throne is the slain lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, who cares for and has purchased a kingdom out of the world (cf. Revelation 4:1-11). God still rules the world. In the center of all of the universe is His throne. In the center of that throne is Jesus, our brother. The comfort that this book offers is that God will keep his promise. When a nation repents, and God says, "They will continue!," then they will continue. When a nation does not repent, and God says, "Now they must be doomed. I decree their destruction;" then all their riches, all their power, all their alliances, and all their "anything" cannot save them, because the Father keeps His promises.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are three lessons of permanent nature to learn from the study of the book of Nahum. **First**, God hates brutality, violence, and wrong. It is so tempting, when one has the power to do so, to abuse people to advance one's self. God hates this kind of selfishness. God hates any brutality, any violence, and any wrong that is brought against any of the innocent, weak people of the world.

The **second** lesson to learn from comparing the book of Nahum to the book of Jonah is there is a limit to God's patience. In the day of Jonah, God had said He would destroy

Nineveh in 40 days, but they repented. And so God repented of the evil that He had planned to do. He did not destroy them and maybe that gave them a sense of false assurance. It is possible that they thought that meant they were blessed by God forever. Some nations have actually believed that. They believed that the past blessings guarantee future blessings. That is not true. The same repentance that brought the past blessing needs to bring the new, present blessing. There is a limit to the patience of God. It is important to realize that the longsuffering of God is salvation, but there is an end to that longsuffering.

The **third** lesson that can be learned from this book is that the Lord is against any nation that acquires wealth by oppression, slaughter, and war. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (cf. Psalms 33:12; 144:15). Blessed is the nation that feeds the poor and the hungry and that cares for those that are in need. That is the nation that will be blessed by God. The Lord is actively against the war-like, materialistic character of most of the nations of this world.

This is a very brief book. Its message is clear. Its lessons are simple. It is important to know that God is ultimately the judge. Although He is loving and merciful, and He is slow to anger, He is the judge. And if the nations take refuge in Him, if they trust in Him, then they will have blessings from God. That can give all kinds of peace to God's people today as well.

HABAKKUK

Introduction

Chapter 17 is about the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk prophesied during a time that he really could not understand. Judah's sun was going down. It was just a few years from their total and absolute destruction. And the wickedness of the land was in front of this great man of God. He was having difficulty understanding it. The book of Habakkuk differs from all the other books of prophecy in one important aspect. Instead of having been God's spokesmen to the people, he took the people's complaint to the Lord. He personified the righteous ones in Judah as they looked at the lawlessness and the injustice in their nation and in their city. They looked at the rising power of Babylon, as it was ruthlessly sweeping away everything before it in its mighty move for conquest. This brings the prophet and the righteous people of the Lord to the Lord with their problem of faith.

It is important to understand a little bit about Habakkuk in this discussion. The other prophets addressed the nation on behalf of God. Habakkuk speaks to God on behalf of the people. The other prophets' tasks were the people's sin, the proclamation of God's doom, and the offer of grace to the penitent. Habakkuk's task was toward God Himself. He wanted to find out what God meant by permitting tyranny and wrong to take place in the world. The other prophets attacked sins. He was the first of all of the prophets to state the problems of life. What did God have in mind in all of this? Habakkuk had witnessed the reformation under the dynamic leadership of Josiah, the last good king in Judah. He had watched the fading

glow of the setting sun of Assyria. The great world kingdom was dying right before his eyes. Habakkuk was a prominent citizen of Jerusalem. He had the confidence and the respect of the leaders of that city. Habakkuk was a careful student of how God had dealt with his chosen people. He would recount all of God's past dealings with Judah and Israel (cf. Habakkuk 3:1-19).

When Habakkuk's doubts arose and he could not reconcile a bad world with a good God and an utterly righteous law, he refused to dismiss his doubt without an answer. He went to God and demanded that God give him the answer to his problem. Thank God for an honest searcher-after-truth who was willing to go directly to God for the answers to his problems. Habakkuk was a lot like Job in this way. In the book of Job, Job refused the quick answers and the quick fixes. He wanted to know the heart of God. He wanted to know the basis of God's activity in his own personal life. Habakkuk was like that. He wanted no quick answers. He wanted no quick fixes. What he wanted was an answer to the dilemma that he faced of how a good God can operate in such a wicked world. How and why does God allow so much wickedness and so much suffering in the world? Those were the questions Habakkuk needed God to answer.

The Date of the Book

After Assyria's Fall In 612 B.C. —

Before First Deportation To Babylon In 606 B.C.

Habakkuk wrote his book sometime between the year 612 and 608 B.C. It was written after Assyria's fall in 612 B.C. It was written before Babylon came down into Judah's land for the first time and deported a large number of people back to Babylon in 606 or 607 B.C. So he wrote approximately 20 years before the total fall of the nation in 586 B.C.

The Outline of the Book

God's Judgment Upon Judah Through the Chaldeans

A look at the book's outline will reveal an over all view of the book that shows what God was saying to Habakkuk, and therefore through Habakkuk what God was saying to His people then and now. **There are three things to remember from the book of Habakkuk.**

First, there was God's judgment upon Judah through the Chaldeans (cf. Habakkuk 1:1-2:3). And the idea through-out this text is that God was saying, "Watch and see. Look at what is happening. See My work and My way in what is happening."

Habakkuk's first complaint is found in Habakkuk 1:2-11. In one sentence his complaint was: how can the Lord justify his indifference in the presence of wickedness and violence? Habakkuk really thought God was indifferent. He said,

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted (Habakkuk 1:2-4).

Habakkuk did not believe the Lord was active in the world. He said, "I'm crying out, and you are not listening. I'm telling you about violence, and you are not saving. I'm seeing all this wickedness prevail, and you are not coming to tell me any different. Am I to assume that you do not care?" Look at the Lord's reply.

Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days

that you would not believe, even if you were told. (Later the proof of that is, when Habakkuk is told, he says he doesn't believe.) I'm raising up the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own (Habakkuk 1:5-6).

Who was doing this? God said, "I'm raising up the Chaldeans. I'm raising up these Babylonians."

They are a feared and dreadful people. They are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on — guilty men whose own strength is their god (Habakkuk 1:7-11).

The Lord's reply was, "I am not indifferent. I will not be inactive. I am raising up the Chaldeans to judge wicked Judah and all the wickedness of Judah." This gave the prophet a bigger problem than he had before. Judah's wickedness was one thing. Babylon's wickedness was much more. God Himself had described them as leopards and vultures. They had horsemen like the desert wind. They derided kings. They scoffed at rulers. They heaped up corpses like mountains.

Now the prophet has a second complaint which can be stated in one sentence: how can a holy God employ an impure and a godless agent? How can God not be guilty in judging a wicked nation with a nation more wicked than it is?

“O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Habakkuk 1:12-13).

Habakkuk said, “I can’t believe you are going to bring this upon us. You can’t use a more wicked nation to destroy a less wicked nation.”

“You’ve made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his net, and destroying nations without mercy?” (Habakkuk 1:14-17).

Habakkuk said, “Lord, you can’t do all this that you said you’re going to do. You can’t do it because you’re righteous and Babylon is not righteous. You can’t do this.” This is like a lot of things that are said today when God’s work is seen in the world. “God, you can’t do this!” It is hard to see like God sees. It is hard to understand His ways.

Watch Habakkuk’s faith: *“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to my complaint”* (Habakkuk 2:1). It sounds like Habakkuk started listening to what Habakkuk was saying. He said, “Wait a minute. I’m questioning the Lord and I’m telling the Lord He can’t do something? Isn’t that ridiculous for me, a creature, to be saying

to God, the creator, what He can do and cannot do? I must not understand all that God has in mind. I must not understand all the background and what God has told me about how He is going to use Babylon to judge Judah. So what I will do is I will get up here and I will wait. I will wait and see. I'll watch and see what God is going to do in the world."

Then God answered Habakkuk a second time.

" . . . Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

What revelation was the Lord talking about? It was the fact that Babylon was going to destroy Judah. God wanted it written down in plain language so that someone could carry it around, enter a city, hold it up, and let everybody read it. Then he would run to the next city and the next until all of Judea had heard the word that Babylon was coming to destroy them. The Lord was the one who is going to bring Babylon as judgment upon all the wicked. God wanted Habakkuk to wait and to watch. And whatever he saw, he was to write it down so that it could be carried through out the land. God wanted all the righteous people to know when they saw Babylon marching through the country, that it was His will, it was by His decree, and it was His sure judgment upon Judah.

God's Judgment Upon The Chaldeans For Their Wickedness

Surely, God can use whatever God wills to bring judgment upon the wicked. But surely God would also one day judge the Chaldeans. He had used the Chaldeans, who were more wicked than the Judeans, to judge the Judeans. Surely, one day God would judge Babylon. (Babylon was the Chaldeans.) The

second thing to remember is that God was telling His children through Habakkuk that He would bring judgment on the Chaldeans for their wickedness (cf. Habakkuk 2: 4-20). If he had judged his people for their wickedness, then one could count on the fact that He would also judge the Gentiles. He would judge the heathen for their wickedness, too. First, Habakkuk was to “Watch and see.” (Or “wait and see.”) Then God was going to tell him to “Stand and see. Stand here with me as the righteous man of God standing with the righteous God, and see the judgment that I have in mind for the wicked nation that has judged Judah.”

The fundamental principle in all of God’s government of the world is:

*“See he (He is the Chaldeans / Babylonians.) is puffed up; his desires are not upright — **but the righteous will live by his faith** — indeed, (Now He is going back to the wicked man.) wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and makes captive of all the people” (Habakkuk 2:4-5).*

This is the fundamental principle in God’s governing of the world. The righteous will live by faith. The wicked will die by their pride, their power, and their greed. *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people”* (Proverbs 14:34). This is something that God’s people need to continually remember along with the verse “. . . *the righteous shall live by faith.*” When God says this, He means that the righteous live by faith physically, mentally, spiritually, and eternally. That is the destiny of the righteous. The destiny of the wicked is to die — die physically, mentally, spiritually, and eternally — because of pride, power, and greed.

God seems to scornfully reproach Babylon with a song that contains **five woes**. There are five woes pronounced upon the

Babylonians (cf. Habakkuk 2:6-20). **First**, there is a woe upon their lust of conquest and plunder.

Will not all of them (This is the righteous reproaching the wicked.) taunt him with ridicule and scorn saying, 'Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion. How long must this go on? Will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them' (Habakkuk 2:6-8).

Because Babylon had lust for conquests and plunder, they would be destroyed by conquests and plunder. Woe to Babylon because of their conquests and plunder.

Second, God pronounces a woe upon them for building their empire through cruelty and godless gain.

Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruins of many people, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, the beams of the woodwork will echo it (Habakkuk 2:9-11). God says, Woe to Babylon because of your cruelty and your godless gain.

Third, God condemns them because they built their city by blood.

Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves

for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:12-14).

Woe to Babylon because of their bloody wars, and **fourth**, woe to Babylon because of their drunken violence.

Woe to him who gives his neighbor drink, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he may gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory (Habakkuk 2:15-16).

Woe to Babylon because of their drunken immorality and violence.

Fifth, woe to Babylon because of their idolatry. This is a good revelation, because God even judges the heathen for not worshiping Him.

Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with silver and gold; there is no breath of the Lord in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him (Habakkuk 2:19-20).

This is not a passage that says we are to be quiet when we come into the church building. It is a passage that says we are to be quiet because God is coming in judgment. God is telling them, "Quit crying out to idols! Quit crying out to man! Quit crying out to money! Quit crying out to anything but God! Shh! Be silent! The Lord is in His holy temple, and He is about to come upon Babylon." Woe to Babylon because of their conquests and plunder, because of their cruelty and godless gain, because of their bloody wars, because of their drunken violence, but

primarily, woe to them because they refuse to worship God.

Prayer For Compassion In the Midst Of Judgement

The **third** thing to remember is Habakkuk's prayer for compassion in the midst of judgment (cf. Habakkuk 3:1-19). First, he had to wait and see, then he had to stand and see. Now he would kneel and see. The key is that people needed to look to God. They needed to wait on God. They needed to stand with God. They needed to kneel before God.

Notice Habakkuk's petition — *"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy"* (Habakkuk 3:2). His plea was, "Lord be merciful."

Then in Habakkuk's prayer, he reminded the Lord of all His past work with Israel (cf. Habakkuk 3:3-15). Habakkuk talked about how God had approached them with judgment upon their enemies rather than upon themselves. And the question was, "Lord why did you do all this? Why did you appear in this fierceness of judgment over and over again in our history, from the crossing of the Red Sea to this very moment? You have come in judgment on behalf of your people again and again. Why did you do that? (cf. Habakkuk 3:8-12) And the Lord answers to tell them that He did it for the salvation of His people: "I did it all so that Israel would be saved."

And now, the prophet, without any direct answer to his problem, had the answer to his problem. The Lord did not give him any answers to his "Why" questions. God just reminded him of the "Who?" He said, "I AM doing this. Can I be trusted?" And Habakkuk thought about all that history and then, he said, "Yes! The Lord can be trusted."

Now notice what Habakkuk said he would do (cf. Habakkuk 3:16-19). This is the heart of the book. This is the reason the book was written. This gives one last look at the prophet. The prophet began as a doubter, and now he ends as a believer.

I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there be no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, when all hope of human life is gone, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. "The Sovereign LORD is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on to the heights (Habakkuk 3:16-19).

That says, "Hallelujah anyway!" What a terrific ending! Habakkuk said, "I don't know the answer to all my questions, but I know the God who is in control of everything, and that is good enough for me."

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, and Its Comfort

The theme of the book is the universal supremacy of God's judgment on the wicked. God would ultimately judge wicked Judah and wicked Babylon. Its message is the value of honest doubt. Here was a man who was honest enough to say, "Lord, I don't understand this. I am doubtful about Your character. I am doubtful about the fact that You are in control. I am doubtful that You are even looking. I am doubtful that You are even listening. Will You please answer me?" God said, "Of course, I will. I will be glad to answer you. I am not indifferent. I am in control. I do rule the world on behalf of My people. Your complaint is noted. Now wait and see what I will do. I encourage your doubt. You continue to doubt." If God's people do not have an answer from God, they have a right to doubt.

They must go to the same place Habakkuk did with their doubt. Go to God. Get into His word, and look for His answer to the doubt. When it is found, trust in God and wait.

The cross of Christ and the empty tomb of Jesus declare that God's people can trust Him. All fulfilled prophecy declares they can trust Him. All of His historical works with His people throughout all the Bible say, "Trust God." When God's people doubt something, they need to be driven into a study of The Book, and God always gives an answer. God's people do not always like the answers they receive. They are not obligated to like the answer any more than Habakkuk liked God's answer. Habakkuk said, "I still don't understand, but I have learned this much. If you take away from me everything that human life depends on, I will still trust God. No matter what happens, I will trust God. And one day in His good will and His good time, He will make my feet like the feet of a deer and cause me to walk upon my high places."

The comfort that this book gives is the basic principle of God's government (cf. Habakkuk 2:4). Faithfulness is the guarantee of permanence. Be faithful to God, believe and trust, rely fully on God, then He will make His people like an oak tree that will stand forever. The righteous will live by faith.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are many permanent lessons in this book. Lesson **number one**, the righteous man or the righteous woman or the righteous people can have courage in the time of crisis. They are the only people that have a right to be courageous in the bad hour when trouble comes. When God wakes up out of His silence and His inactivity, and He comes in judgment the righteous, and the faithful can have courage.

Lesson **number two**, in every crisis God can be trusted even when He cannot be understood. So many times the activity of God is beyond any person's understanding. Paul asked the question,

Who has known the mind of the LORD ? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:34-36).

God can be trusted, but His ways are hard to understand. He is as far above man as the sky is above the land. Man just cannot understand the Lord Almighty, for He is the one with all knowledge. He is the one that is everywhere. He is the one with all power. He is the one that must judge all the wickedness of man and reward all the righteousness of man. Man cannot understand a being like that, but an old rugged cross and empty tomb tell men they can trust God. He keeps His promise. He fulfills His will. He did not make one single promise in the Old Testament about the Messiah that He has not fulfilled.

Lesson **number three**, in dealing with doubt, God invites His children to turn to Him and to wait for His answer. When God's children do not understand, they do not have to run around in confusion. They do not have to wring their hands in despair. Whether they understand or not, when trouble comes or when doubt comes, God's children can relax and turn to God. They can turn to His word and simply wait on His answer. Wait for the reply that He is coming.

Lesson **number four**, evil is self-destructive. There are within evil itself the seeds that will bring about its destruction. Surely history has recorded that. Think about the evil men of the world, very few of them died in peace. Napoleon died in exile without any land to occupy. Caesar died with a knife in his heart without any more worlds to conquer. Over and over again, the men that the world called great for even a moment are all gone. Death, the grim reaper, brought them to an end.

Evil is self-destructive, but on a tree that became a cross, just outside the city of Jerusalem, a good, righteous, and sinless man met Death. Death that had been the conqueror of all others was conquered by Him. Death died that day. Why? Because

Death is evil, and He is righteous. Evil has within it the seed of its own destruction. The righteous will live by faith. The evil will die because of their immorality. Believe in God. Do His righteous will. Trust His righteous character. And find all kinds of peace in believing in Jesus.

HAGGAI

Introduction

The study of the book of Haggai is chapter 18 in our study of the Minor Prophets. Haggai is one of the shortest of the prophetic books and probably the simplest to understand. He was a man of one mind — build the temple of the Lord. The world sits up and listens when a man challenges a nation to break away from habits that have held them for a generation or more. He challenged them to rise up and do a great work by building a great temple for the worship of their God. Haggai was able to do the seemingly impossible task of producing the spark that would set the Jewish people on fire to work in rebuilding God's house.

The Historical Background of Haggai

It is important to learn a little about the historical background of this book because he did not speak in a vacuum. He spoke in a historical background to historical needs. Haggai was a part of the first return to the land. Between the book of Habakkuk and this book of Haggai, Judah had gone into captivity in Babylon, and for seventy years they have had no joy. The psalmist wrote, *"By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion"* (Psalm 137:1). They ate no clean bread. They performed no clean service to God because they were away from the holy land, and they had no holy temple. When the Babylonian empire fell to the Persian empire, Cyrus, the Persian king, told God's children that they could go back to the land they were from and build a temple to their God

(cf. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

So Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, led the people of God back to the promised city of Jerusalem in the year 536 B.C. In Jerusalem they laid the foundation for their glorious temple. When the old men saw the foundation of the temple, they saw that it was going to be nothing compared to the size and the glory of the temple that had been destroyed in 586 or 587 B.C. It was possible that Haggai was one of these older men. So discouragement set in when these people began to mock and say, "This is nothing at all. Why are we building such a small temple?" They became so discouraged that they stopped building the temple and turned to build their own houses. They built homes that were nice and sealed. They build houses that had ceilings rather than thatched roofs. They turned to doing their own things, and weeds began to grow up around the temple site. This was a sign that they were neglecting the temple of God. They neglected the temple of God for sixteen years and did nothing to continue the building of God's house.

Then Haggai was called in 520 B.C. to urge the people to work on building the temple that they had allowed to stand without being built for so long. (Zechariah was also called by God for this purpose.) The completion of the temple in 516 B.C. brought glory to God, but the people were still disappointed, because physically speaking, it was nothing compared with the temple that they once had enjoyed. In 445 B.C. Nehemiah came back to rebuild the wall. Once the wall was finished, the whole city was completed. They had built houses, their temple, and a wall around the great city of God. It was a city in which they should have taken pride. It was a city that should have brought glory to God.

The Persian Kings

There were five Persian kings during this period of time. Cyrus, the Persian king from 559-529 B.C., was the person who sent them back to the land primarily to build the temple of their God. God said that Cyrus' decree would get the city itself built,

but only the temple's foundation would be laid (cf. Isaiah 44:24-45:13). It should be easier to build one building than an entire city. It was, but God wanted everybody to know that He was in control. So knowing the facts ahead of time in His beautiful, all-knowing ability, He said that in Cyrus' day they would build the whole city. Before it happened, God prophesied that they would build houses and their city but would only lay the foundation of the temple.

Cambyes, the son of Cyrus, reigned from 529-522 B.C. Darius the Mead came to the throne in 521 B.C. and reigned through 486 B.C. It was in 520 B.C. that Haggai and Zechariah began to preach. This is also the year the people began to build the temple of God again. After Darius came Xerxes, who is Ahaseurus of the book of Esther. He reigned from 485-466 B.C. The last of the Persian kings during this time period was Artaxerxes, who reigned from 465- 425 B.C.

The Prophet Haggai

The prophet Haggai was the very first prophet to speak to the new Jewish colony. Once they got back to the land, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, were the driving force to help them begin to build the temple. When they became discouraged with that, they built their houses. God had to set up the office of prophet again because the governor and the priest were not enough to incite the people to repent and return to God. God had Haggai speak to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant that had returned to the land. “ . . . *Ask them, ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’*” (Haggai 2:2b-3). Haggai was probably an old man at this time, and he was probably one of those old men that could stand around and look at the foundation that the young men were building and say, “This is nothing compared to the good old days. I can remember it like it was before.” Before long they began to discourage the people. Haggai, as one of the men who had seen the temple as it once was, was probably close to the same age as all of the “discouragers.”

He was going to be given the ability by God to have the spark that would let them see the unseen. He would help them to see with the eyes of their heart rather than with the eyes of their head. That would enable them to see that if they would build this smaller temple that God was giving them the privilege of building, then in latter days God would give them the power and the right to be a part of the great kingdom of God. They would have the right to be a part of a temple which even Solomon's Temple cannot compare to. Solomon's Temple is just a shadow of **the Temple** that was to come.

Haggai's faith was so great because he knew God was with him. *"Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: 'I am with you,' declares the LORD"* (Haggai 1:13). Haggai had the kind of confidence he needed to inspire the people. The people had begun to build the temple again, then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people. *"I am with you," declares the LORD.*" In Haggai 1:13 there are three times that Haggai called the Lord's name. And there was one time the Lord Himself spoke using the pronoun of "I" when He said *"I am with you."* Four times in one verse Haggai gave credit to the Lord for all that He was doing. Haggai's faith gave assurance to the people of Judah that God was with them.

The New Testament gives this same kind of assurance. Matthew says that she (Mary) will bring forth a child and will call His name Jesus. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through His prophet Isaiah when he said that a virgin would bring forth a child, and they would call Him Immanuel, which means "God is with us" (cf. Matthew 1:21-23; Isaiah 7:14). Jesus sent the apostles out and told them, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (cf. Matthew 28:20b). Paul told the Colossians that the hope of the Gentiles is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). God's children today can have the same kind of faith that Haggai had. Whatever God wants done, His children can say, "I can do it because God is, and He is with me."

Haggai was either a priest, or very close to the priests. He taught a whole lesson about what the priests should tell the people about holy things and unholy things. Jewish tradition would make him a member of the great synagogue, the ruling people of the city, out of which later the Sanhedrin would come. If those Jewish traditions can be trusted, he would have been one of the Supreme Court. There is no doubt that this man was a trusted, faithful, and passionate prophet of God. He had one single purpose and that was to make sure the people built the temple of God again. He did not care what it took to get it done, as long as it was legal and spiritual.

The Date of the Book

The date of the book is very easy to determine because the Persians kept such accurate history. He said that the book was written in the second year of King Darius, which dates the book at 520 B.C. He prophesied from the first day of the sixth month to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. That is 114 days which means he prophesied six days less than a three month period on the Jewish calendar. Everything in this book came about in less than three months. It had been sixteen years since anyone worked on the temple, and it was happening because of this spokesman for God. His secret was simply the fact that he was Jehovah's messenger giving Jehovah's message to Jehovah's people, saying, "I, Jehovah, am with you." He was the Lord's man giving the Lord's message to the Lord's people for the Lord's purpose to get the Lord's work done. That was how he could get the work done. "*Thus saith the Lord,*" was at the heart of everything Haggai had to say.

The Outline of the Book

The outline of Haggai covers the book as a whole. This enables the reader to understand what Haggai was saying to the

people of his day, as well as to God's children today.

The First Message: A Popular Saying And the Prophet's Response

The first message from Haggai deals with a popular saying that the people are leaning on and Haggai's response to it.

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest (Haggai 1:1).

This first message is simply to the two leaders, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. *"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'These people say, "The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built"'"* (Haggai 1:2). The popular saying was — "The time is not right." They had opposition from those that were around them. They had their own houses to build. They had become discouraged by the words of the old men as to the size of the building. They had even heard the rumors that were coming to them from Persia that the king was not pleased with what they were doing. So, they said, "It's just not the right time."

Listen to the prophet's reprimand and the Lord's reply:

Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while my house remains a ruin?' (Haggai 1:3-4).

God said, "Is it right for you to be prospering while I am not? Is it right for your houses to be finished when my house is only a ruin?" It was never the right time to build in the house of God, but it was also never the right time not to.

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but you never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it' (Haggai 1:5-6).

All of this was happening to them because God's house was in ruin. They were concerned with their material possessions, and they were not concerned with the things of God. There was a solution to this problem.

This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'Give careful thought to your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,' says the LORD. 'You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew it away. Why?' declares the Lord Almighty. 'Because of my house which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands' (Haggai 1:7-11).

He said the solution was to build the temple. They did not have anything because the drought came; but the drought came because they had not done anything. And the drought would come again if they did not do as God commanded. He said, "Get up to the mountain, cut down the wood, bring it down and go to work on building a house for Me." Haggai had a simple solution to their problem — Believe in God, be faithful to God, and work for Him, then God will bless you." There is

something holy about work. Haggai says, “Go to work and build the temple of God,” and the people responded. Haggai preached to the leaders, but the people responded also.

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD (Haggai 1:12).

If the leaders repented and followed God, then the people would do the same. In one word, the people responded in “Fear”. They held the Lord in high awe, so they went up onto the mountain, cut down the trees, brought the trees into Jerusalem, and started building the temple of God because Haggai had told them the drought would cease. He said, “God’s blessing will come, if you will simply build the temple.”

The Second Message: The Glory of the New and the Old Temples

The second message (cf. Haggai 2:1-9) deals with the fact that the temple they were building was a smaller temple than the one they had before. This message was meant to give them the encouragement to keep building. The prophet’s message was that all the judgment was because they had not been building, and the blessings would follow once they started building. But they had to have a reason to continue, so after they had been working for a while, Haggai spoke again. He contrasted the glory of the old temple with the glory of the one that is to come (cf. Haggai 2:1-10). They had been rebuilding for a number of weeks:

On the 21st day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to

Joshua son of Jehozadak, and to the remnant of the people. (This time the message goes to the people and not simply to the leaders.) Ask them, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?”’ (Haggai 2:1-3).

The **first** discouraging words that were circulated among the people were: “It’s not time to build.” Haggai took care of that by saying, “It’s always time to build.” The **second** discouraging words were: “This temple is nothing compared to the temple we had before. Why do we want to build this little old thing when we used to have such a great temple?” Haggai responded, “Isn’t that the way it looks to you?” Sometimes the problem needs to be stated aloud before all the people so the solution can be discussed. He said, “This is the way it is, isn’t it? This temple is nothing compared with the temple that you had seen before.”

God’s response was

‘But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty (Haggai 2:4).

God was saying, “The glory of that first temple was Me. The glory of **this Temple is Me**. The glory of any other temple is going to be Me. I am here, and if I am here, all the glory of the old temple is here. It doesn’t matter the size of the building. It is the size of the God that inhabits the building. It is the size of the God that blesses the building. I am here, so be strong in my presence, O Zerubbabel. Be strong because I am here, O Joshua. Be strong, all you people, because I am here. If you will work, if you will just be strong and work, I will be with you.” Haggai believed that God did not dwell within anybody who

was not working. Anybody that believes in God and is working on the **Temple of God** has God dwelling with them.

“*This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear*” (Haggai 2:5). God said, “Do you remember at Sinai? I told you that if you would do My will, you would be there forever. I put My spirit with you to show it. I am still that way. I covenanted, and I keep My covenant. I am and will always be with you, so do not fear.” Not only did the presence of God bring strength and the ability to work, but it removed fear. God told them, “Don’t be afraid of all these Gentiles that are threatening you because you are building. Don’t be afraid of any of these old men who are trying to discourage you from building. Just know I am there, and that I want one thing done today. I want My temple built. I may want more than that done later, but right now all I want done is for My temple to be built. Build My temple, and I will be with you.”

Then God talked about a coming glory. He was the glory of the old. He was the glory of the present temple they were building. But there would be a new temple to come which He would fill with glory. And it would be more glorious than anything they had ever imagined. It would even be more glorious than Solomon’s great temple.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while (The writer of Hebrews will discuss this in Hebrews 12 as the establishment of the church.) I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty (Haggai 2:6-7).

God said, “In the coming days I’m going to cause a world-wide judgment, and in the midst of that world-wide judgment, I will set up a kingdom that will never pass away in which all nations will live, and I will fill that house with glory. All glory is mine.”

“‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD God Almighty” (Haggai 2:8). God said the glory of Solomon’s Temple was His. The glory of this temple would be His. They were both temples of gold and silver and worldly things that one could see and appreciate with the eye. All of that former glory was still God’s glory. It was holy.

‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty (Haggai 2:9).

Solomon’s Temple probably had more gold and silver in it than any temple that has ever existed. But God says, “The latter glory will be greater than the former glory because the spiritual always outweighs the physical.” In the future kingdom God would grant peace. That kingdom would not only be more glorious because of its spiritual character, but it would be more glorious because of its peaceful grant. In the new temple to come, which is the church and the kingdom of God, Jesus will be the peace, and He will give the peace to all those that come.

The Third Message: Priestly Lessons From The Law

Haggai’s next message came two months later with some lessons from the law about the holy and unholy (cf. Haggai 2:10-19).

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Ask the priest what the law says: If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?”’ The priests answered, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches

one of these things, does it become defiled?’ ‘Yes,’ the priests replied, ‘it becomes defiled’ (Haggai 2:10-13).

If holy flesh touches unholy flesh, the holy flesh does not make the unholy flesh become holy. If unclean flesh touches clean flesh, then the unclean flesh does make the clean flesh unclean. It is so much easier for evil to contaminate good than it is for good to change evil. The lesson in these questions is that sin is contagious. God is saying, “Stop all your evil talking. Stop all the negative talking. Stop being ‘discouragers.’ It is causing the people to be unclean.”

God’s message for the people was that just as He cursed them every day in the past from the day they laid the foundation of the temple until they began to rebuild, He would bless them (cf. Haggai 2:15-19). He cursed them because they were not building the temple, but now He will bless them because they were building the temple.

The Fourth Message: Hope For Revival of the Davidic House

The fourth and last message in this outline of Haggai deals with the fact that there was the hope for revival in David’s house (cf. Haggai 2:20-23). God said again that He would shake heaven and earth. He would put a signet ring on Zerubbabel’s hand, and Zerubbabel would stand for the one ruler in the Lord’s house forever and ever. God said, “Because you are building this temple, I’m going to bless you physically (cf. Haggai 2:15ff), and because you are building this temple, I’m going to bless you spiritually. You and your people forever will dwell in My house and will be ruled by the one that is represented here by Zerubbabel.”

The Teachings of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, and Its Comfort

The book of Haggai has some very simple teachings. The theme is just three words — build the temple. That was all Haggai was sent to say. The message of the book is — build the temple and God will bless you. Once they had started building the temple, Haggai told them, “Now, God will bless you.” The comfort of this book is — the obedient will ultimately be blessed. Every time, without fail, when God’s children hear the word of God and obey it by building whatever God calls them to build, then God’s blessing will follow.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are three permanent lessons to be learned from this book.

Number one, a stern call to duty is a good tonic or medicine. Every now and then when God’s children are settled on their couches, they need somebody to come in and shake them and say, “Get back to work! Do your duty! Fulfill your promises to God!” It is good for the people of God to every now and then be shaken in their boots so that they do not become complacent.

Number two is that outward splendor does not constitute true glory. God does not count people. He wants people He can count on. God is not concerned with how many buildings there are or how glorious they are. He is not really concerned about how many people come to hear the preaching or the singing. He is concerned with the question of “Is their heart in this? Are they doing this because they want to serve Me?” Israel was building their houses. They were talking about God. They were going to the synagogue to hear God taught. They were carrying out all the religious rituals of Israel. But they were also in the midst of famine, drought, decay, and sin because they were not doing the one thing that God wanted them to be doing at that

time. That was building His temple. The one thing that God has in His mind today is that all the world hear about Jesus. And all that is done that does not move toward that is in vain. God wants His temple built in every nation of the world, in every hamlet, in every hut, and in every heart.

Number three is the basis of all successful preaching and teaching is found in the words “Says the Lord.” This little book only has thirty-eight verses, and that phrase or that idea is found twenty-six times in some form in those thirty-eight verses.

The key verse to Haggai’s success was “*Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: ‘I am with you,’ declares the LORD*” (Haggai 1:13). This is the same thing that God’s people need for success today. They need to be the Lord’s messengers, declaring the message that comes from the Lord to the people that says, “‘I am with you,’ says the Lord.” Even though this is a very short book, it has the secret for all success in its message. Be strong. Build the temple. Believe in God. Proclaim His word. And receive the peace that comes from knowing without a doubt that those who work for God and His glory are in the heart of God. This is a knowledge that should give great peace.

ZECHARIAH (PART 1)

Introduction

Zechariah was a contemporary with Haggai in building the temple. What Ezekiel was to the pre-exilic and exilic eras of time, Zechariah was to the post-exilic age. He outlined the program of restoration, the heart of which was to be the Temple and the priesthood; and like Ezekiel, he filled in many of the details about the Messianic age that lay ahead of them. With a new urgency to establish a durable kingdom, he proclaimed the Lord as King over Judah and promised that there would be a day when the Lord would be King over all the nations. It has been said by many that he is the most messianic prophet of all the Old Testament because he spoke more about the King and the kingdom than even Isaiah or Jeremiah. The book of Zechariah has so much to say about Jesus and His kingdom, the church. That is why this book will give close and careful attention to the book of Zechariah.

The Date of the Book

The date of this book starts in 520 B.C. and ends sometime in 516 B.C. when the Temple was finished, or shortly after that time. Chapters 1 through 8 are dated from the eighth month of Darius' second year to the ninth month of Darius' fourth year (cf. Zechariah 1:1). That is 391 days that Zechariah prophesied. He spent just a little over a year prophesying about the Temple. During that time, the Temple was nearly completed. Chapters 9 through 14 are undated, and thought by most scholars to have been written after 516 B.C. But there is really no reason for that

because, since the Temple was almost finished, it would be time to talk about the Temple to come, and that is exactly what Zechariah does.

The Outline of the Book

Introduction: A Call To Repentance

The outline of this book will give a glimpse of what the book says as a whole. First there is a call to repentance (cf. Zechariah 1:1-6).

The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore, tell the people: 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Return to me," declares the LORD Almighty, "and I will return to you. . . . Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices." But they would not listen or pay attention to me,' declares the LORD (Zechariah 1:2-4).

The Lord is saying, "Listen and return to me," so this is a call to repentance and a call to return to the Lord. That was needed a few months after they had started building the Temple. They needed to be reminded that their forefathers started out good, but they finished badly. There was a definite need for God's people to return to Him and to finish the work that He had assigned for them to do.

Eight Night Visions: Israel's Immediate Future

The heart of the first section of the book of Zechariah is in the first six chapters. There are eight night visions that Zechariah received about Israel's immediate future. **Number one** is the rider and the horsemen among the Myrtle Trees (cf. Zechariah 1:7-17). This vision means that where God is, peace reigns. Peace rules wherever God is found, wherever God is

honored, and wherever God abides.

During the night I had a vision — and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. I asked, 'What are they, my Lord?' The angel who was talking with me answered, 'I will show you what these are.' Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, 'They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth. (These are the cherubim who are the avenging angels of God.) And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, 'We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace' (Zechariah 1:8-11).

The whole world was at rest and in peace because God was in Israel again. God was in Israel again, because they had begun to build God's Temple. God would take up his permanent abode with them again, and wherever God is, there is peace.

Number Two is the four horns and the four craftsmen or blacksmiths (cf. Zechariah 1:18-21). The interpretation of this vision is simple — brute force must be put down because it is an insult to God. God will always put down brute force.

Then I looked up — there before me were four horns! I asked the angel who was speaking to me, 'What are these?' He answered me, 'These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Jerusalem and Israel.' Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. I asked, 'What are these coming to do?' He answered, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people (Zechariah 1:18-21).

God avenges His people. The horns and craftsmen say that brute force will be put down.

Number three is the vision of the man with the measuring line (cf. Zechariah 2:1-13). The interpretation of this vision is that the Lord is their wall of security. The Lord is their glory and to whom honor is given.

Then I looked up — and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! I asked, ‘Where are you going?’ He answered me, ‘To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is’ (Zechariah 2:1-2).

Remember at this time Jerusalem did not have a wall. The wall would not be built until the fifth century (about 450 B.C.) by Nehemiah. So he had gone to measure Jerusalem to build a wall around it.

Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him and said to him: ‘Run, tell that young man’, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will be its glory within’ (Zechariah 2:3-5).

The Lord was saying, “You don’t need a wall for protection. I will protect you. You don’t need a big wall to prove your glory. I will be your glory.” God was telling Israel to build the Temple and not to worry about the wall right now. He would take care of the wall. He would send a man later to build a wall around the city of Jerusalem. God would be their wall of protection, and He would be their glory rather than the Temple they were building.

Number four is the vision in which Joshua is accused by the adversary, then cleansed and clothed by God (cf. Zechariah

3:1-10). Joshua is standing before the angel in filthy garments. God come and the adversary accused him of his filthy garments. So God cleansed him, clothed him, and called him His anointed. The interpretation is — God cleanses! God clothes those He anoints. God cleanses and clothes those that He sends His Spirit upon. Paul speaks of God's sons and says they have been cleansed, baptized into Christ, and they have put on Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27). They are robed with Christ, called sons of God and His anointed. God says, "Do not worry about your garments. I will take care of that. I will cleanse you. I will clothe you. I will anoint you."

Number five is the vision of the golden lampstand and the two olive trees (cf. Zechariah 4:1-14). The interpretation of this vision is God empowers His leaders. He not only clothes them, cleanses them, and anoints them, but he empowers them. This is the passage that will be alluded to in the book of Revelation speaking of the great power God gave the leaders against the Roman persecutor (cf. Revelation 4:5; 11:4). God was saying, "Don't worry about your enemies. You are a golden lampstand. Don't worry about the enemy being necessary for your supply of oil. I put two olive trees there. I'll put two vessels there to fill this lampstand that it might shine to be the light of all the world. You build My temple and you will be the light of all the world."

Number six discusses a flying scroll on which the names of sinners and the sins of the land are written (cf. Zechariah 5:1-4). The interpretation is that sinners and their sins will be removed from the land. God will not only cleanse His leaders, He will also cleanse His land. All the sinners and all the sins committed would not be written on the scroll that could be read in Israel's land because they are obedient and following God. God was saying, "Just build this temple, and you will be righteous in my sight."

Number seven is a description of a woman in a measuring basket (cf. Zechariah 5:5-11). The Israelites used baskets of different sizes to measure out their dry goods like grain. The

lesson in this vision is that God is removing the appearance of sin from the land. The woman in the basket represents the wickedness of the land. A lead lid is put on it so that she can not escape, and two women with wings carry the basket away from Israel. God said, “This nation will no longer be characterized by wickedness, so I am removing sin or wickedness from the land.”

Number eight is the last night vision. It is of four chariots and their horsemen (cf. Zechariah 6:1-8) Chariots in the Old Testament have always been representative of the leader of all the nations. This vision represents God and the four closest to Him, which would be the “*four living creatures*” that are around the throne (cf. Revelation 4:7; Ezekiel 1:5; Isaiah 6:2-8 — cherubim or seraphim). The creatures are riding upon their chariots, and they are bringing judgment upon the wicked, and therefore, salvation to the righteous. The interpretation is that God keeps His promises, and He will judge the wicked.

God was going to take sin and sinners out of the land. He would make a wall around them, give them glory, and their victorious warrior. He would fight their wars for them. They did not need to worry about fighting a war. They did not need to worry about defeating the enemy. They just had to obey God and build the Temple. He would defeat the enemy. Seek Him and His kingdom, and everything else takes care of itself (cf. Matthew 6:33-34).

The climax of all of these visions is the crowning of Joshua (cf. Zechariah 6:9-15). God had cleansed Joshua, the high priest (cf. Zechariah 3:1-10), and now He was going to crown him. This event really took place, but it was also symbolic of the branch, the Messiah, the king, and the priest.

The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Take silver and gold from the exiles . . . who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and the gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest,

Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out of his place and build the temple of the LORD" (Zechariah 6:9-12).

This is not the Temple that they were building. It is a temple that the One called the Branch would build later. In Isaiah 11:1 Jesus is called a Branch from the stump of Jesse: "*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit.*" This is Jesus the Lord. He was going to build a temple later. It was He who would build the temple of the Lord, and He would be clothed with majesty. He would sit and rule on His throne and be a priest. There would be harmony between Jesus and God. Zechariah closed this section by saying, ". . . *This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God*" (Zechariah 7:15b).

This message came to them just eighteen months before they finish building the Temple. God knew they were going to finish. They knew they were going to finish, and they were thrilled to be doing it. They were looking forward to finishing their task. God said, "Let me tell you what's going to happen now. I am sending the Branch. I am sending the One that will be both king and priest, and He will build a temple that will make this one appear as nothing." The old men had said when they saw this one, "Why, this is nothing compared to Solomon's Temple." God said, "Yes, and because you have built this little temple, I am going to give you one that will extend from sea to sea and from land to land."

The Problem Of Ceremonial Fasting

While the Israelites were in captivity, they were so sorrowful that they began to fast at times they were not commanded to fast. An inquiry came from Bethel asking if they should continue these fasts. The reply was that there was no reason to continue useless fasting. Insincere fasting is useless (cf. Zechariah 7:1-13). God told them that they needed to be

faithful, and He gave them a warning that their moral and spiritual obedience was required (cf. Zechariah 8:1-4). He talked to them about the future restoration and blessing of Zion (Zechariah 8:1-17). He would bring restoration to them in the form of blessings and honor and glory to God (Zechariah 8:1-13). They were already restored to the land, but there was a single condition to this restoration — they must continue to obey (cf. 8:14-17). When they finished the temple, they needed to understand that their obedience was not over. They had been obedient in that requirement of God, but everything that God had said about worshiping Him must also be obeyed.

God gave them a positive reply to their question, “Shall we continue to fast?” (Zechariah 8:18-23). Zechariah talked about the nature of the true worship that was to come (cf. Zechariah 8:18-23). Their fasts would become feasts. They fasted in captivity because of sorrow. Fasting is always because of sorrow, the afflicting of one’s soul, or for a long period of prayer. Instead of fasting they were going to feast. There was no reason to fast because they were back in the land. They had been obedient and blessings would come, so they could eat, drink, and enjoy the land that God had given them. It was a sin against God to walk around sorrowful in the midst of His blessings. Many nations will seek God and entreat Him because they will see all the feasting and rejoicing (cf. Zechariah 8:20-23). God’s people will find great blessings from God by building the Temple and obeying Him. Nations will notice that God has honored His people, and they will come to seek Him.

The Messiah and His Kingdom

The second half of the book of Zechariah concerns the Messiah and His kingdom (cf. Zechariah 9:1-14:21). The **first oracle** in this section is the judgment of Israel’s enemies (cf. Zechariah 9:1-11:17). The Messiah’s first coming is discussed. The Messiah would come, and when He came He would come with blessings for Israel, salvation for Zion’s citizens, and glory for Zion itself. Jehovah would fulfill His word. When this

happened some of it would be good for Israel, and some of it would be bad. He would fulfill everything that He had promised. First of all, He would take care of them (cf. Zechariah 10:1). He would give them material blessings, give them strength, redeem them. Jerusalem would be destroyed, because they rejected the Good Shepherd. It sounded terrible that Jerusalem would be destroyed, but it was good that Jerusalem be destroyed because they have rejected the Shepherd of God. If Jerusalem was not destroyed, then the Good Shepherd would not be able to shepherd the poor among the flock of Israel because Jerusalem would continue to reject Him.

The **second oracle** was about the future of the Lord's people in view of all that was going to happen (cf. Zechariah 12:1-14:21). What would happen to God's people when Jerusalem was destroyed? When Israel's nation was finally rooted up — not just branches lopped off, not just a tree cut down so that later a stalk could grow, but when they are destroyed totally root and branch (cf. Malachi 4:1) — what would God do for His people then? What was the future of the righteous? There were obedient people who were building the temple, what would their future be like? God would protect and glorify His people, the church (cf. Zechariah 12:1-14). He would do that by the powerful might that He has by being the Shepherd of the flock of God. He said He would make a time that all the people of God were equal in His sight, and everyone would be anointed and crowned just as Joshua had been. God would protect and glorify His people.

God was so sincere about saving the righteous that He would even smite His Shepherd (cf. Zechariah 13:1-9). He says,

'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land,' declares the LORD, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one third I will bring into

the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, "They are my people" and they will say, "The LORD is our God" (Zechariah 13:7-9).

To be able to save His people, God would smite His equal, His only begotten Son, the One who is close to Him and His shepherd.

The **second oracle** covers the protection that God was going to give His people and the fact that He would have to smite His own son to do that. All of this was part of the future of God's people. There is also going to be a day of judgment which would involve vengeance and salvation (cf. Zechariah 14:1-21). This was that great day that is called "*the day of the LORD*" or in some versions "*the day of Jehovah.*" It would be God's day of judgment.

When God comes down to the earth and judges the entire world, it will be a day of destruction and vengeance for the enemies of God's people. God will take care of all His enemies on that day. What kind of day will it be for the saints? What about the ones who built the Temple in spite of all the ridicule, the troubles, and the temptation to quit? What about the ones who walked one day at a time — faltering one step at a time, sometimes falling — but always walking toward the goal of serving God? What kind of day will it be for them? That day will be a day of salvation and honor. Everything will be holy unto the Lord, even down to the pots and pans that a woman cooks with and the tools that a man works with.

The Teachings of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, and Its Comfort

The theme of Zechariah's book deals with the Temple, the kingdom, and Christ, the Messiah. The theme is build the temple of God and He will bless you (cf. Zechariah 1-8). In the

second half of the book, the theme is the glory of the King and His kingdom (cf. Zechariah 9-14). The message of Zechariah is the fact that everything in God's house is holy. The golden vessels with which God had been honored were holy even under the Old Covenant. He says that every pot in Jehovah's house will be holy unto Jehovah. Every pot and pan in all of Israel will be holy unto Jehovah:

On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar (Zechariah 14:20).

The reference to "horses" points to the war-like character of man, and even that will be holy unto Jehovah. There will be no merchandising in God's house and no Canaanite in the land. Everything will be holy unto Jehovah.

This book offers beautiful comfort. It says God always blesses the obedient. It does not matter what the world tries to do. God blesses the obedient. It does not matter what their brethren try to do. God blesses the obedient. Paul tells the Romans the same thing. "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). The two requirements are the same in Zechariah as they are in Romans. God's obedient people must love the Lord and be called to do the work that God has assigned them to do. They must be called according to His purpose. Love the Lord, and then be called according to His purpose. Being involved in fulfilling the purpose of God on the earth will make everything work out together for good, and blessings will come.

Its Permanent Lessons

The **first** lesson is the worldwide reach of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is not a provincial thing. It is not limited to one province or nation. Zechariah says that the King will rule the

world (cf. Zechariah 2:11; 6:15; 8:23; 14:9). All the nations of the earth will come and honor the King. All the people in the world will bow down to the King. The kingdom of God is world-wide in its reach. I have not traveled all the world, but I have been in over a dozen countries, and the most beautiful thing in those visits was, I got to sit down with God's people. I got to worship in the kingdom of God with them, to find out that the same King that was King in my land was also King in theirs. The kingdom of God extends throughout all the world.

Second, Zechariah talks about the eternal glory that comes from Christ, the Messiah (cf. Zechariah 2:10-11; 3:8-9; 6:12-13; 9:9-17; 11:4-14; 12:10; 14:8, 9). He says honor the King and the Messiah and give God the glory that rightfully belongs to Him. When the Messiah came, angels bowed down before Him, man bowed down before Him, and on the cross the devil bowed down before Him. There is eternal glory due to Christ:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

The **third** lesson of permanent value is that God does and always will rule. Zechariah closes this book with a picture that the kingdom is to come. He sees the One who is ruling over the kingdom. He does not see Him as a shepherd with some foolish instrument, or as the monarch who presses his will and his way upon his subjects. He does not see a person who is wanting to make himself rich by being the king; Zechariah sees the God who gave His only begotten son. He see the God who loved man enough to place His son on the cross. This is the God who rules the kingdom.

The throne of God sits at the very center of the universe (cf. Revelation 4:1-11) At the very center of that throne there is the slain lamb. The throne of God still sits at the center of the

universe today, and at the heart of that throne is the brother of every Christian in the world. God, the father, Jesus, the brother, and Holy Spirit, the comforter, all rule, not only in this world but in the world of heaven and of hell. There is nothing to fear. There is great peace in believing in Jesus Christ.

ZECHARIAH (PART 2)

Review

Zechariah came to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in the first return (cf. Nehemiah 12:16). He was both a priest and prophet and was a contemporary of Haggai (cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Haggai, the older man, only prophesied for three months. Zechariah prophesied for a little over two years. He differs from all the great prophets that preceded him in at least three points. Number one is the emphasis that he gave on visions as a means of divine communication. Eight night visions in quick succession are the basis of the first half of his book. Then he differs because he used apocalyptic symbolism in his visions. He pictured things not in reality, but in visions and symbols that declare the reality. He differs also because of the greater amount of angelic mediation in his communications with the Lord. Angels brought the vision and carried out the mission. From the beginning to the end, he pleaded for the rebuilding of the house of God just as Haggai did. His most inspiring promises center around the completed Temple. He is the prophet that said, "If you get this Temple built, you will not only be blessed materially by the Lord, but He will heap upon you spiritual blessings your mind cannot even imagine. You will dwell in a glorified land, you will serve in a glorified temple, and you will live a glorified life."

The Date of the Book and the Outline

The date of this book is between 520 and 516 B.C. The outline of the book begins with an introduction that says,

“Return to the Lord”. There are eight night visions that declare the Lord’s protection, blessing, cleansing, and power to fulfill His word. Then he tells them that they needed to start periods of feasting, rather than periods of fasting, since the joy of Jehovah would be the key note of their future days and not the desolation of Jehovah. He pictured the King and the kingdom in all of its glory as he looked beyond the temple that was being built to a temple that would be built. He looks beyond Zerubbabel and Joshua, their leaders, their king, and their priests, to Jesus the Messiah who would be their King and their Priest.

The Teaching of the Book It’s Theme, Message, Comfort, and Permanent Lessons

The theme of Zechariah is if Israel would build this temple, God would bless them, and the King would come with all of His kingdom. The message of the book is that everything in God’s House would be holy. These were themes the Jews really needed so that they would get the job done and still know that there was a job to be done afterwards. The message was also needed so that they knew that from now on they would be holy. In Babylon’s land they had been unclean, and when they returned to their land for at least the first few years, they remained unclean because there was no presence of God there. There was no holy place where God could put the cloud that said, “I am here.” Zechariah’s message told them that when they got the Temple built, God would be in the land. Wherever God is, everything is holy. The comfort this book offers says God always blesses the obedient. God’s people have to love Him and do His will to receive His blessings. The permanent lessons are that the kingdom of God is worldwide in its reach, Christ, the Messiah, is due eternal glory, and God does rule and will always rule.

Some Special Studies From the Book

This chapter is going to cover some special studies from the book of Zechariah. We will look at them in detail because they speak so graphically to every era. The **first** study will be looking at the different pictures Zechariah portrays of the Christ.

Pictures of the Christ: The Messianic King

The **first picture** is of the Christ as the Messianic king that is to come. There are seven different phrases that describe Christ as the Messianic King in these two verses.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:9-10).

This is the Messiah. First of all it says He will come “*having salvation*.” He does not come to save Himself, He comes offering salvation to the people. He is a Savior. The King that is to come will come with salvation in His hand. He will come bringing salvation to His people.

He will be a humble, gentle, pure, and righteous Savior. Jesus said,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

The righteousness of Jesus is seen when He faces His enemies and says, “*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?*” (John 8:46). The humbleness of Jesus is seen during his triumphal entry when He enters the city of Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey just as Zechariah had prophesied. The Pharisees looked at Jesus through the microscope of their own prejudice for three years trying to find something wrong with him, and they were not able to find one single thing wrong in his life. He is a humble, gentle, pure, and righteous Messiah.

Jesus will be victorious. He says, “I will come and break all the battle bows of all the world. I will break the chariots of Ephraim and the battle bow of Judah. I will come to be victorious over all the enemies of the people of God” (cf. Zechariah 9:9-13). Jesus comes riding upon a beautiful white horse (cf. Revelation 19:11-21). He comes sprinkled in blood that is not His own. It is the blood of His enemies that He stomped beneath the feet of His white horse. He comes to win all battles and to be victorious over all enemies. Following Him are the righteous riding upon white horses dressed in fine linen, white and clean (cf. Revelation 19:14). This linen represents the righteous acts of the saints. The saints are robed in white linen, washed in the blood of Christ, and therefore His victory is their victory. The saints cannot sanctify or pay the tragic debt they owe. Jesus paid their debt. They have been defeated time and time again by their enemies. Jesus defeated all the enemies and is victorious over all the battle bows of all the world.

Jesus is an effective Savior, too. Zechariah says He will “. . . proclaim peace to the nations.” Paul told the Ephesians, “*For he himself is our peace,*” (Ephesians 2:14a). He is the God of peace who brought the great Shepherd of the sheep back again from the dead (cf. Hebrews 13:20). The prophecy throughout the Old Testament is “*In this place I will give peace,*” and Jesus came to be peace and, therefore, to give peace to all of the land.

He is a majestic Savior. *“His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”* This is a lesson that all the world needs. All the world will not hear it, but it is true anyway. All the rulers of the world do not believe it, but it is true anyway. That rider on the white horse in Revelation has a name written on His robe and on His thigh: *“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”* (cf. Revelation 19:16). All the wicked and all the kings of the earth need to understand that Jesus Christ is their ruler and the brother to all saints.

Pictures of the Christ: The Rejected Shepherd

The **second picture** of Jesus is as the rejected shepherd (cf. Zechariah 11:4-17; 13:7-9). God’s Shepherd was rejected by God’s flock; but, nevertheless, God saved a poor remnant among them. Zechariah deals with the fact that their own shepherds have brought unsparing slaughter to the flock of God.

This is what the LORD my God says: ‘Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. (They have butchers, not shepherds.) Those who sell them say, “Praise the Lord, I am rich!” Their own shepherds do not spare them. For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands’ (Zechariah 11:4-6).

Israel had wicked shepherds that were destroyers. A friend of mine visited the Bible lands not long ago. He was riding in a bus that had a guide who had been a shepherd earlier in his life, and he was discussing the difference between Oriental shepherds and European shepherds. He said European shepherds drive their sheep and Oriental shepherds go before

their sheep. As the bus topped the hill, there was a guy behind about twelve sheep. He was throwing rocks at them and hitting them with sticks to drive them down the road. The shepherd guide said, "Stop this bus!" He got out and talked to the guy driving the sheep. When he came back onto the bus, he said, "I knew there was something wrong. That guy wasn't a shepherd. He was a butcher, and he was driving those sheep to be slaughtered." The leader of God's people ought to lead the people, call them by name, and go before them. He ought to heal their sicknesses. The shepherds of Israel were not doing that. They were selling and eating the sheep, but they were not shepherding them.

There is a contrast given between what their present shepherds were doing and the good Shepherd (cf. Zechariah 11:7-17). The good Shepherd comes, and He says, "*So I pastured the flock . . . I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock* (Zechariah 11:7). He guides the old people. He guides the people with His favor and His union. But they rejected Him, and, therefore, He has to judge them. The good Shepherd, who has been rejected by His own sheep, has to become their Judge.

So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor (That is God's grace.) and the other Union (That is unity.), and I pastured the flock. In one month I got rid of the three shepherds (Zechariah 11:7-8a).

This may refer to the coming Jesus because He is the Good Shepherd. And for a period of time He shepherded Israel, particularly the oppressed of the flock, the poor, the downtrodden, the distressed, the prostitute, the publican and the tax collector. He pastured the flock of God, and He put down their false shepherds (cf. Matthew 23:1-39).

Jesus condemned the false prophets of Israel. The Israelites

followed them because they were shepherds, but He says they are to be condemned because they were not acting like shepherds. *“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him”* (John 1:11). He did pasture the flock, but they rejected Him. *“The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them”* (Zechariah 11:8b). He was the Good Shepherd who never did them harm. He fed, healed, clothed, and housed them. They still rejected him. *“And I grew weary of them.”* That is a tragic word. How terrible that the Shepherd should grow *“weary”* of His sheep. He said, *“ . . . ‘I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh’ ”* (Zechariah 11:9). They rejected Him, and He grew weary of their rejection, so He rejected them. *“ . . . ‘Let the dying die. Let the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh’ ”* (Zechariah 11:9b)

Note the judgment that God’s own Shepherd came to render.

Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD (Zechariah 11:10-11).

The flock as a whole is judged. He broke the covenant He had with them. A good point to remember here is that people can lose the grace they have received.

The afflicted of the flock knew this was the word of God, so they accepted the shepherd.

I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ so they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’ — the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter (Zechariah 11:12-13).

This is a prophecy of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. This is exactly what Judas did. He carried the thirty pieces of silver to the house of the Lord and threw it at the feet of the priests. Then the priests went out and bought a potter's field that was made into a burial place for the poor. Zechariah knew this because the Spirit of God revealed it to him.

Jesus had broken His covenant and His favor (grace) with them.

"Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. Then the LORD said to me, 'Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd'" (Zechariah 11:14-15). The equipment of a foolish shepherd would be a staff that has no crook in it. That hook at the top of a shepherd's staff is to get the sheep that have fallen off a hillside. The shepherd can pull his sheep to safety using the hook. With a straight staff, all the shepherd could do would be to push the sheep to their own destruction.

For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. 'Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blind.' (Zechariah 11:16-17)

Notice the severity of the judgment of God upon the shepherds.

But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Rejected Shepherd, and now the Smitten Shepherd (cf. Zechariah 13:7).

‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, (This is quoted in the New Testament and applied to Jesus at his death [cf. Matthew 26:31].) and I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land,’ declares the LORD, ‘two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say “They are my people,” and they will say, “The LORD is our God”’ (Zechariah 13:7b-9).

Notice the beautiful lesson of the shepherd. The shepherd was coming in judgment upon the false shepherds and the wicked that were among the sheep. The shepherd would not only save the afflicted sheep, but he would refine and purify them, and they would say, “This is our shepherd. We will follow Him.” Jesus is the Great Shepherd.

Pictures of the Christ: The Divine Sovereign

The **third** picture of Jesus is as the Divine Sovereign (cf. Zechariah 14:1-11). The day of the Lord’s judgment is also discussed in these verses. That day is seen again and again. It is the day of final judgment upon the wicked enemies of God. Here, it is a day of fear and flight as the Lord comes to execute the day.

But then the Lord is also seen as the One who brings the water of life to these people. *“On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter” (Zechariah 14:8).* Jesus said, “I am the water of life.” when He said, *“If anyone is*

thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38). Jesus asked the woman at the well for water, and she questioned Him —

‘ . . . How can you ask me for a drink? (For the Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? . . . Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:9-14).

In Revelation John describes the scene around the throne of God with “ . . . *the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God . . .*” (Revelation 22:1).

Jesus is the Water of Life, but he is also the King. “*The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name*” (Zechariah 14:9). This is exactly what Peter said on the day of Pentecost. “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Paul said the same thing to the Ephesians when he said, “*There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one LORD, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Paul said the same thing to the Corinthians as well.

“ . . . there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed

there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one LORD, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:4b-6).

There is only one Lord and one God. Man may believe there are many gods, but anybody who lives in the Temple of God knows there is one God.

Notice the peace that is secured. *"The whole land from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, . . . It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure"* (Zechariah 14:10-11).

The King Cometh

Jesus is the king who brings peace to the people of God. Notice the titles that are given to Jesus. He is "the king" that is coming (cf. Zechariah 14:9). *"Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch"* (Zechariah 3:8). Christ is the Servant, and He is the Branch. He is God's servant. He is God's branch from the stock of Jesse, who was David's father. *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit"* (Isaiah 11:1). He will be the holy One of God (cf. Isaiah 11:1). Jesus is the servant. God's children today may be servants, but Jesus is the servant of God. This *Branch* that is Jesus, becomes the vine from which all children of God are the branches (cf. John 11:1-5). God's children are branches of Jesus, but Christ is the branch of God. God's children may be servants of Christ, but Christ is the servant of God. The One who is exclusively the servant must be served to become a servant. The One who is exclusively the branch must be "in" to become a branch.

" . . . See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of

a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9b). This is Christ the King. Jesus is seen as the King by his triumphal entry on a donkey’s colt. This might seem like a strange way for a king to enter the city, but David did it this way as well. These are the only two kings known to enter a city in triumph this way. Alexander the Great, the Roman generals, and all the Roman Caesars came riding upon the great white charger of their victory. Jesus, on a donkey’s colt, declared, “I will find victory the way no one else has found victory — on the old rugged cross.”

Christ is the Good Shepherd (Zechariah 11:4-11; 9:16). He will come as the shepherd of God to tend to the flock of God. Jesus said,

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:11, 14-16)

Jesus said “I am the good shepherd” twice to emphasize the fact that He is the only Shepherd deserving of the adjective “good.”

The good Shepherd became the smitten Shepherd (cf. Zechariah 13:7) so that man might be saved. Christ also became the betrayed Master (cf. Zechariah 11:12-13). Judas was sorry for what he did. He threw the money back, then went out and hung himself (cf. Matthew 26:15; 27:3-5). That was an ungodly sorrow. It was a worldly sorrow because it led to death. Peter betrayed him with words instead of silver (cf. John 18:15-18, 25-27; Matthew 26:34, 71-75), but Peter was there to repent when Jesus came back. His was a godly sorrow that led to repentance.

Christ become the Pierced One in the house of His friends.

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son” (Zechariah 12:10).

The Messiah, the Good Shepherd, the smitten Shepherd, and the betrayed Master, now becomes the Pierced Friend. It was His own people who pierced His side. They were the ones that John had prepared for Him. They were the ones that He came to preach to. They were the ones He healed, the ones He fed, and the ones He had given back their dead. They were the ones He lived among, served among, wept among, and laughed among who pierced Him. They were not the enemies of God that pierced the hands of Jesus. They were not the strangers. Even though the Romans drove the nails, it was the Jews that pierced His hands. They did what God planned as this text indicates. This also was what Peter preached, “You did what God’s determinate counsel and foreknowledge planned would come to pass. You did what God in His purpose determined had to be done” (cf. Acts 2:22-23).

The key passage of all this is *“If someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ he will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’ ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!’ declares the LORD Almighty (Zechariah 13:6a).* He is the stricken shepherd of God. Christ is wounded in the house of His friends, but it was God who awoke the sword. It was God who said, “I will judge my shepherd.” God did that, so He would not have to judge the children of God. They owed a debt they could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe. On the cross Jesus not only opened up a fountain where His children could be saved, but it was by the judgment of God upon that cross from which the fountain flowed. God had to make a choice. He could judge the entire world, and they would have no hope; or

He could judge His Shepherd, and the whole world would have hope. God's children need to be grateful to God that He found it in His love to smite the Shepherd so that the world might be saved. It is in that salvation that they find the great peace in believing in Jesus.

ZECHARIAH (PART 3)

Introduction

Zechariah's name means "The Lord Remembers". That name is prophetic since that is also the heart of his message — the Lord remembers. He proclaims to the people that the Lord God, as their covenant God, will remember His covenant forever that was established with Israel on Mount Sinai. By the Lord's command and by the inspiration of the spirit, Zechariah preached God's covenant law to his people. He did that in order to make them conscious of their wickedness, and also conscious of God's gospel which alone could turn them back to the Lord to serve Him in loving obedience. Since Zechariah was a priest (cf. Ezra 4:24) and the head of his family, he naturally took a keen interest in the Levitical priesthood, as well as in the restoration of the Temple.

Review: Date, Outline, and Teaching of the Book

The date of the book is between 520 and 516 B.C. The first section of the outline of the book centers on building the Temple. The second section centers on turning their fasts into feasts. The third section centers on the coming Messiah, the King, and His kingdom. There are many great teachings within the book that have already been covered. Some special studies will be covered in the next two chapters that are applicable today. Zechariah pictures Christ in ways that perhaps no other prophet does. He talks about the coming of the King and what will happen when the King arrives. He talks about the blessings of the kingdom and what we have in the kingdom of God.

Some Special Studies From the Book (. . . continued)

The Angel of the Lord

Zechariah emphasizes the phrase “the Angel of the Lord”, but it is also seen throughout all the Bible. Who is this Angel of the Lord? What does He do? Is He seen in the New Testament? The Angel of the Lord appears first in the age of the Patriarchs, then throughout the history of Israel this Angel is seen. He is seen in the age of Moses on Mount Sinai. He is seen in several of the judges’ lives, He appears to David, and He appears to Elijah. He appears in the vision of Zechariah. He is even in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, as the messenger of the covenant. A careful study of the passages that mention this Angel will make it evident that somehow this Angel is the Lord Himself. Perhaps He is the pre-incarnate Name, or perhaps this is the pre-incarnate name for the Word which became flesh. Remember that the word “Angel” means “messenger”. The word “word” means “message.” And this Messenger always brings in His person the message of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth
(John 1:1, 14)

If the message becomes flesh, then that would be the messenger. It is possible that John is saying that this Old Testament messenger has now become the message of God. And Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (cf. John 14:9).

There are many passages in the Bible that refer to “the Angel of the Lord.” This is not “an” angel of the Lord, this is

“the angel of the Lord. (Sometimes the passage may have “*the angel of God*,” “*the angel of his presence*,” or just “*the angel*”.) Read the following Old Testament passages and the contexts surrounding them:

Genesis 16:7-11; 21:17; 22:11-15; 31:11-13; 48:16;

Exodus 3:2; 14:19; 23:20-23

Numbers 22:22-35

Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-12, 20-22; 13:3-23

2 Samuel 24:16

1 Kings 19:7

2 Kings 1:3, 15; 19:35

1 Chronicles 21:12-18, 30

Psalms 34:7; 35:5-6

Isaiah 37:36; 63:9

Zechariah 1:11-12; 3:1-6; 12:8

Malachi 3:1

There ought to be no doubt when reading these passages that the Angel was one with the Lord. God promised Israel to send an Angel before them. This Angel would keep them and bring them safely into Canaan. He identifies this Angel or Messenger with Himself. The rest of this chapter will cover some of these passages to help draw a conclusion about who this angel of Jehovah really is.

Exodus 23: 20-23

‘See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites,

Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

Jehovah says of this Angel, “*My name is in him.*” That was the name which He Himself had called His own. This is His name forever (cf. Exodus 3:13-17). Remember when the Lord Jehovah was talking to Moses, and Moses says, “Who will I say sent me?” “*God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’*” (Exodus 3:14) God said, “That is my name. I claim it and I will be called that forever.” That was the name He gave Himself, and then He was saying “it” was in the Angel. Isaiah 42: 8

“*I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.*” That is His name. It is the name He said He would give to no other one. This is also the name that He says is in His Angel. In His very nature and being, He is the Lord.

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Therefore, God calls this Angel the Angel of His presence. This is talking about God as He led Israel out of captivity in the wilderness. Read Exodus 23:20-23 again. God said that He would send His Angel ahead of them. In Isaiah God called this Angel “*the Angel of his presence.*” Literally that means “the Angel of His face.” When they faced that Angel, they faced God. He was the Angel of His being, the Angel of His substance. This was the same Angel that led them in the wilderness which Paul said was Christ. “*They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). This was the Angel of

God who would later become the messenger of God in the New Testament. Those who looked upon the Angel in the Old Testament looked upon the Lord. In the presence of the Angel, Jehovah was present.

Judges 6:11-23

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.' 'But sir,' Gideon replied, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, "Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?" But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.' The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' The LORD answered, 'I will be with you, . . . ' Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, . . . Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.' And the LORD said, 'I will wait until you return. . . . Gideon went in, . . . he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. The angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat. . . And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD , he exclaimed, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!' But the LORD said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.

This was an appearance of the Angel to Gideon, one of the judges. Notice that first it was the Angel of the Lord who came and sat down under the oak tree. But then later it says, “*The LORD turned to him. . .*” so the Angel of the Lord becomes the Lord. Gideon did not think this was just a man anymore. He started out calling the Angel “Sir”, then he called him, “Lord”, and finally when he truly realized who the Angel of the Lord was, Gideon said “*Ah, Sovereign LORD!*” Now, Gideon understands that he had been in the presence of the Lord Himself, because he had seen the Angel of the Lord. When the Angel was there, the Lord Himself was present.”

Judges 13:2-4, 6a, 8-9a

A certain man of Zorah named Manoah (This is Samson’s father.) from the clan of the Danites had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The Angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, ‘You are sterile and childless, but you are going to give forth a son.’ Then the woman went to her husband and told him, ‘A man of God came to me. He looked like an Angel, very awesome. . . . Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: ‘O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again. . . . God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman . . .

When Manoah was able to talk to this Angel, he told him that they would like to offer him a young goat. The angel told Manoah that he would not eat any of their food. The Angel of the Lord told Manoah to prepare a burnt offering and offer it to the Lord. At this point the Bible says that Manoah did not realize that he was talking to the Angel of the Lord (cf. Judges 13:2-23).

Judges 13:17-23

Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, ‘What is your name so that we may honor you when

your word comes true?’ He replied, ‘Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.’ Then Manoah took a young goat . . . and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ‘We are doomed to die!’ he said to his wife. ‘We have seen God!’ But his wife answered, ‘If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.

Notice that Manoah spoke to the Angel of the Lord thinking that he was a man. When he found out that he was the Angel of God, he said, “I’m going to die because I have seen God.” Seeing the Angel of the Lord was the same thing as seeing God to Manoah. Someone might say, “But that’s just man’s opinion.” It is also God’s — the Lord calls this Angel “God”, “Lord,” and “Jehovah.”

Genesis 16:7-13

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; . . . And he said, ‘Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?’ ‘I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,’ she answered. The the angel of the LORD told her, . . . The angel of the LORD also said to her: . . . She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’

By inspiration the Bible records that the Angel of the Lord is God.

Genesis 33:11-13a

The Angel of God said to me in a dream, 'Jacob.' And I answered, 'Here am I.' And he said 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me.'

Here the Angel of the Lord declared Himself to be the God of Bethel, He was the one who had given the vision of the ladder descending up into heaven.

Judges 2:1-4

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, "I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars."' 'Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.' When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud,

The Angel attributes to Himself the Lord's oath, the Lord's covenant, the Lord's deliverance from Egypt, and the Lord's conquest of Canaan. In the verses throughout the Bible where these events were actually happening, it was the Lord Himself who had accomplished all these things. In Judges, it was the Angel who said, "I did that." In the verses concerning Gideon and Manoah and his wife, these people offered sacrifices to God by offering them to the Angel of God. In the book of Revelation when someone tried to worship an angel from God,

the angel would say, *“Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”* (Revelation 19:10; 22:9) The Angel of God accepted worship, just as Jesus did when he came. The only one in the Bible that accepts worship is God. The Angel is God.

Hagar in her conversation with the Angel of the Lord said that this was God and He Himself claimed to her to be the Lord (cf. Genesis 16:7-14). Abraham and Jacob referred to the Angel the Lord as Lord (cf. Genesis 22:8-18; 48:3-16).

Zechariah 1:11-13

And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.’ Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?’ So the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

The Angel of the Lord was the one who pleads with God for the people of God.

Zechariah 3:1-2

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?’

Zechariah saw the Angel of the Lord as he cleansed Joshua and puts a fresh robe on him and a crown on his head. This angel is called “the Lord” by Zechariah.

Malachi 3:1

‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, who you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty.

This Angel of the Lord was the covenant Angel or the covenant Messenger, as Malachi calls him. The Messenger was called “the messenger of the covenant”. When the word “covenant” is used in the Old Testament after Sinai, all of the Jews knew that it meant they were talking about the covenant that came to Moses — the Ten Commandments and all that followed which would be the entire Law. Paul says in the book of Galatians that the Law was mediated through an Angel.

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one (Galatians 3:19-20).

This is the Messenger of the covenant who put the law into effect. And yet God says He saw Moses face to face (cf. Exodus 33:11). There would be no mediator between them, and that is why Paul says “a mediator does not represent just one person.” God Himself is the Angel of the covenant.

The Angel of the Lord showed Himself on many occasions in the Old Testament to the people in regard to the covenant of God. He showed Himself to Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:18-21) as He talked about the possession of Canaan’s land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates. God spoke to Abraham through the Angel (cf. Genesis 12:1-7; 13:15-18; 15:4-5) when God talked to him about giving him a seed and when God

“credited it to him as righteousness” because he believed the Lord. Abraham would have a physical and a spiritual seed, the covenant of God. God confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath (cf. 22:15-19).

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar near a spring in the desert (cf. Genesis 16:7-14), to Jacob as he saw the stairway reaching to heaven (cf. Genesis 28:10-22), and to Moses in the burning bush (cf. Exodus 3:1-22). Time and time again the Angel appeared when the covenant of God was being revealed. The Angel claims to be the author of the covenant.

The Angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your forefathers.’ I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of the land, but you shall break down their altars. . . .’
(Judges 2:1-2a)

Notice these verses again. The Angel said, “I brought you out of Egypt. I led you. I gave you the covenant.” After the exile, it was the Angel who pleaded for the covenant people of God (cf. Zechariah 1:11-13). It was the Angel after the exile who absolved Joshua and confirmed the high priestly office of the Old Covenant as a type of the New Testament priesthood of all believers (cf. Zechariah 3:1-10). Malachi, as the prophet who closes the Old Testament, called this Angel the Messenger of the covenant and says that He was the Lord coming suddenly to His Temple. The temple under consideration was the church of the New Covenant as the long expected Redeemer, the Refiner of the people, and the judge of the world came to his temple.

It is not strange at all that the One who was to come as the Messiah, the Word of God, and the Son of God in the New Testament should also have a prominent place in the Old Testament. God the Father and the Holy Spirit are emphasized

and repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament. It is not strange that the second person of the Godhead should also have an emphasis within the Old Testament as well. That is why there are twenty-five incidents within sixty-five passages that reveal the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ as He will become. The Angel of Jehovah came and appeared to the people of God, and particularly appeared to some leaders, not only to empower them, but also to assign them tasks. This was God Himself. This was the One who would say, "I and the Father are one" (cf. John 10:30). This is the One who would say, "My words are the words that will judge people in the last day" (cf. John 12:48). This is the One who came riding out upon a white horse and on His garment and on His thigh is a name written, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords"(cf. Revelation 19:11-18). His name is called, "The Word of God," the message of God (cf. John 1:1-14). The messenger of the Old Testament is now personified in the incarnated human flesh and has become the Message of God. Believe Him. Believe His message. Find great peace in doing that.

ZECHARIAH (PART 4)

Introduction — Review

This is the fourth and last chapter on the book of Zechariah. The book was written in the sixth century between 520 and 516 B.C. Zechariah is a book that discusses the heart of the life of the people of that day, but it can also bring great meaning into the lives of the people today in this new covenant age. The book contains eight night visions that convey the fact that God is in total rule and control of all the world. There is a discussion concerning fasting and feasting. When the Israelites were in Babylonian and Assyrian captivity, they participated in fasting, but now that they are back in the land and God was dwelling among them, fasting was no longer needed as a key to worshiping God. God told them they needed to feast rather than fast. The third part of Zechariah's book covers the kingdom of God and the King Himself being exalted.

Special Studies From the Book . . . continued

The Blessings of the Kingdom of Christ

The blessings of the kingdom of Christ are discussed in Zechariah 9-14. **First**, Zechariah specifically tells the extent of this kingdom.

On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name (Zechariah 14:8-9).

Notice how wide spread the kingdom was going to be. It would cover the whole world for all time.

This Old Testament reference in Zechariah says that living water will flow out from Jerusalem. Jesus said that whoever believed in Him would have streams of living water (cf. John 7:38). Jesus is the living water that Zechariah prophesied about. The extent of His kingdom will be over the whole earth. Jesus told His disciples to make disciples of all nations (cf. Matthew 28:19). He said, “Go preach the gospel to the whole world” (Mark 16:15). He said, “My house is a house of prayer for all the nations (cf. Mark 11:17). The extent of the kingdom of Christ is all the earth. The extent of this coming king was all the earth. Christ is this coming King.

Second, His kingdom will have abundant material blessings.

Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone (Zechariah 10:1).

Whenever this Messiah who is the King comes, He will bring abundant material blessings. Paul tells the Corinthians that God is the one who supplies this seed to the sower. “*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness*” (2 Corinthians 9:10). He not only talked about the fruits of righteousness, which would be spiritual blessings, but he talked about material blessings coming to the people of God. Jesus said, “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (Matthew 6:33). Seeing real poverty will help a person realize he has been abundantly blessed with material blessings if his needs are met. That is exactly what is promised.

Third, spiritual blessings are also promised in this coming kingdom. The Lord said to Zechariah, “*And I will pour out on*

the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son” (Zechariah 12:10). The Lord told Zechariah that He would give them a spirit of grace. This is not the Holy Spirit. It involves an attitude of grace and supplication. Grace will be their gift, and supplication will be their response to that gift. Paul told the Ephesians that God our father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3). He told the Philippians that God would supply their every need and save them into His eternal kingdom (cf. Philippians 4:19). On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God Himself was poured out, and that Spirit was promised to everyone who would repent and be baptized. This promise was and still is for all whom the Lord will call (cf. Acts 2:38-39).

The spiritual blessings in the kingdom of God are beyond imagination. There is not only the grace of God in His mercy, but there is the fact that He hears prayer. This is the spirit of grace and supplication. Imagine being able to say one word, “Father”, and all of the attention that is needed is automatically there. All the gifts are there to be had. If necessary, God would stop all the activity of heaven and earth just to listen to one of His children’s prayers. It is not necessary that God stop all the activity. All the people of God can call out at one time, and all the people of God would have the total attention of God. The real depth of prayer is that God listens when someone talks to Him. Prayer does make a difference, because God listens.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Jesus told His disciples that they could ask for anything

according to His will (cf. Matthew 7:7). The spiritual blessings of God are grace (gifts) and supplication (prayer). James said,

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its crops (James 5:16-18).

That is how powerful these spiritual blessings are in Christ. God does not just pour out grace and supplication. He pours out an attitude or a spirit of grace and a spirit of supplication. God's children have received the grace of God and are saved from past sins. Whenever His children speak, God listens. That is one of the greatest blessings of the kingdom.

Fourth, Zechariah tells the people of God that they not only have physical and spiritual blessing, but they also have salvation. *"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity"* (Zechariah 13:1). William Cowper wrote, "There is a fountain filled with blood that flows from Immanuel's veins" (cf. First verse of the song "There Is A Fountain" by William Cowper written in 1771.). Paul told the Ephesians that the saints have redemption through Christ's blood (cf. Ephesians 1:7). John says, *"and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, . . . To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,"* (Revelation 1:5). There is a fountain. It is the blood of Christ, and it is open. It was not opened and then closed. Once it was opened, it has stayed open, and it is open even today. Anytime and anywhere that anyone wants salvation, he can run to the cross of Christ, and in the blood that still flows freely from that fountain, there he can have redemption from his sins. He can have salvation even

from the frustration of the sinful life that he has lived in the past. John tells the “*dear children*” that “. . . if we walk in the light, as he (God) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The **fifth** point about this kingdom is that it will be set up on earth.

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. The whole land from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah (This is a desolate land.). But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place . . . It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure (Zechariah 14:9-11).

The kingdom will be set up and will never be destroyed. That is exactly what the writer of Hebrews says.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken — that is, created things — so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’ (Hebrews 12:26-29 [cf. Deuteronomy 4:24]).

That is the day of Jehovah. Jehovah will come as a fire and devour all the enemies. When all the enemies are devoured, the kingdom of God will stand forever. This is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and the writer says we are receiving that kingdom.

The **sixth** quality of this kingdom is that it will make no distinction. “*The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem’s inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah*” (Zechariah 12:7). There will be no distinction between the Jew and the Gentile, between the bond and the free, between male and female. This is how Paul described the kingdom to the Galatians.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

“*And if you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.*” This is a beautiful concept. The gospel, which went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, makes no distinction between the two. There is no distinction between slave and free, male and female. The writings of the second century and the third century brethren are interesting. In many of the congregations of the Lord’s church in the second and third centuries, the slaves were the leaders of the church. Many times the master would come to a worship service, and it would be his slave that was the elder or bishop and the overseer of his soul.

The **seventh** point that Zechariah makes about the kingdom is that everyone and everything is holy.

On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD’s house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to

sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty (Zechariah 14:20-21).

Everything and everyone will be “*HOLY TO THE LORD.*” This is what Peter told “*God’s elect*” in the New Testament.

As you come to him, the living Stone — . . . you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5).

God’s people are the holy kingdom of God, a people for God’s own possession, separated and holy unto God.

These are the blessings of the kingdom. Zechariah paints a beautiful picture of the kingdom that all God’s children are a part of with Jesus as the ruler.

A Good Time For Good People

In this coming kingdom there will be a good time for all of God’s good people.

‘On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of all the nations’ (Zechariah 12:4).

In this kingdom there will be a time when all of the enemies of God’s people shall be vanquished. The horse and the rider (their enemies) will be smitten with madness, but the Lord will protect Judah. It is a time when their enemies will be destroyed.

It was also a time when their power would be increased.

Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God.' On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves (Zechariah 12:5-6a).

There is power in the kingdom of God, in the church of Jesus Christ, and in the church of the firstborn ones. There is power in the life of everyone who has been made holy unto Jehovah.

There was the power of unity that gave the leaders of Israel confidence in their people. It was the union and the valor of their people that was the strength of these leaders. Without that unity, without that union, these leaders would find themselves to be utterly powerless. There was power in the leadership, but Zechariah said that power was in “followership”. If there was not great “followership”, there could not be great leadership. The leaders of the kingdom of Christ — the churches of Jesus Christ — cannot be confident unless they know that the people they lead are united with God and united with them. That is really what unity is. Charlie agrees with God and Jack agrees with God, and therefore, Charlie and Jack are one because they agree on a common authority. So this is the power of unity.

There was also the power of conquest. *“On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves.”* God invested all good leaders with the power to conquer their spiritual foes. As fire consumes wood and straw, so the righteous consume all their enemies. It was the leaders that went before the people that were to be remembered for their faith, and their faith was to be imitated. It was a time when the strength of God’s people was to be made greater.

Then it was a time when all of God’s people would be settled in their homes. *“They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place”* (Zechariah 12:6b). The Jews would say, “We will all have a house, and every man will sit under his vine and under

his fig tree, and none will make them afraid for every age of their life.” This language expresses the fact that they would occupy their land and have permanent possession of it. No one could drive the people of God from their land. *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the LORD Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”* (Philippians 3:20-21). The children of God await a Savior from heaven who shall fashion anew this vile body of our humiliation that it might become conformed to the body of His glory. God’s children are citizens of a nation that has never had a race riot, a fixed election, or an ungodly ruler. Their citizenship is in heaven and, therefore, they have permanent possession of their land.

This time to come would be a time when all would be blessed equally.

The Lord will save the dwelling of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem’s inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. (Zechariah 12:7-9)

On that day God’s people will be like the Angel of the Lord — they will be like God. Paul told the Galatians that they were all *“one in Christ Jesus”* (cf. Galatians 3:26-28). They and all God’s children are clothed with Christ. because they have been immersed into Christ. There will be equal honor in this coming kingdom. There is equal honor in the kingdom of today’s church. There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free. Every person is a new man in Christ.

God has saved Jew and Gentile without any reference to circumcision (cf. Acts 15) and without any reference to the law. God brought salvation to Cornelius' house and gave him equal honor with the apostles themselves (cf. Acts 10-11). God gave the Gentiles the same gift just as he does for His children today when they believe on the Lord.

There is equal honor, and there is equal protection.

On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:8-9).

God says, "I will protect Jerusalem. I will protect Judah. I will protect all of My people and they will be the house of Jerusalem and all the house of David. All the house of Abraham will be like God Himself — like the Angel of Jehovah."

The Reign of Holiness

One of the greatest lessons in the book of Zechariah, and in the Bible as far as that is concerned, is in the last two verses of this book. Read these verses one more time.

On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty (Zechariah 14:20-21).

These two verses say more about holiness than whole books that have been written. These verses say that holiness will embrace all the affairs of the leader's life. "*Upon the horses*" — there is your warrior — "*and upon the cooking pots*" — there is your priest — will be inscribed these words: "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" Up until this time these words had only been inscribed in the Old Testament on one thing. These are the words that were inscribed on the ephod of the high priest. The high priest was the only one entitled to wear that inscription. But now these words are inscribed upon the bells of the horses, upon the warriors that fight the world: "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" And on every pot in the Lord's house, the ordinary pots in which people cooked and ate food, were to say, "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*"

So today all those who are fighting battles and serving the Lord are to be called "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" The great old men and women in the kingdom that lead us day by day in our warfare against Satan are to be called "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" Those who provide the ordinary food for the leaders of God, let them be called "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" Everything done in fighting our war and everything done for the Lord today is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" This holiness also embraces all domestic concern. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be "*HOLY TO THE LORD*" Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. Every pot and pan in Israel, every pot and pan in the kingdom of God today, is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" There is holy cookware. When the woman washes the dishes at the end of the meal, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As she cuts up the food and peels the vegetables, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As she soaks the rice and cooks it, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As she puts it on the stove and watches it boil just enough to be eaten, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As she sweeps her floor or makes up the beds, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As the man goes to his work, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As he writes the contract, that is "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" As he drives the

nail or chops the wood, that is “*HOLY TO THE LORD.*” As he cares for his children, that is “*HOLY TO THE LORD.*” As he disciplines his child, that is “*HOLY TO THE LORD.*” Everything and everyone in any domestic concern is “*HOLY TO THE LORD.*” Holiness embraces all the leaders, all domestic concerns, and all religious characters in all areas of religious activity.

“*On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord.*” Everyone comes to sacrifice, and they are holy. But there are no merchandisers in the kingdom of God today. There are four New Testament passages that will help to clarify this point.

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2 Corinthians 2:17).

You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness (1 Thessalonians 2:5).

Paul says that an elder must be “. . . *not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*” (1 Timothy 3:3 KJV). The NIV says, “. . . *not a lover of money . . .*”.

“*But there were false prophets among the people, . . . Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute*” (2 Peter 2:1-2). Peter speaks of some ungodly men who had come to them and preached the word of God for money.

The false prophets of the Old Testament are even found in the New Testament. They will not be found in the kingdom of God because they are part of the kingdom of the devil as he tries to counterfeit the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God every man wants one thing — Holiness! Holiness comes only from God. Peter says, “*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am*

holy''' (1 Peter 1:15-16 [cf. Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7]). Holy means separated. The kingdom of God and everybody in it is separated from the world unto God to serve Him. Upon them, upon their warfare, upon their kingdom, and upon their sacrifice are written these words: "*HOLY TO THE LORD.*" Find peace in the holiness of God.

MALACHI

Introduction

Malachi is the last of the minor prophets. He was a man who has sensed the futility of the cold, formal, external type of religion that masqueraded under the name of the genuine. In dynamic rebellion he threw all that he could muster into the work of bringing the people back to the spiritual concept of the worship that God requires. The book of Malachi is an argument with the people. Malachi did not present his message in preaching form. He made a charge against the people, and the people responded, and then he proved the charge and moved to a next one. His book is not a sermon to the people. It is an argument with the people. He not only argued with the wicked among them who in forgetfulness of what Jehovah was like have corrupted the temple rituals and have failed to give the temple tithes they pledged to give (cf. Nehemiah 10:1-39). They have abused the justice that was deserved by the poor. They have divorced their wives so that they could marry foreign women. Malachi argued with them about all these things.

He also argued with the pious and the religious among them, who were equally forgetful of God's character. They were driven by their pride to ask questions like, "Does God really love Israel?" and "Is he a God of justice, and if he is, where is he?" They asked, "Isn't it vain to serve him? What good do I get from serving God?" The book of Malachi offers the following answers to those questions. God does love Israel and has established them back in their land. God is being worshiped even among the heathen, so why are they not worshiping Him? God is the loving father of all of Israel. God

will bless Israel when they put away their abuses and bring their tithes to God.

The main lesson in Malachi is that God was coming to totally destroy Israel, but He would send a warning. He would send Elijah. From the time that Malachi prophesied until the coming of that Elijah in John the Baptist, there are four hundred years. For four hundred years, Israel had no other prophets. They sat in prophetic silence, but they were not left alone, as the book of Malachi will show.

The Date of the Book

This book was written sometime between 445 and 430 B.C. In 445 B.C., under Nehemiah's great leadership, the people had pledged to bring their tithes into the Lord's storehouse. In this agreement with the Lord, there were a number of other things that they pledged to reform. They pledged to cease mixed marriages, which caused their children to speak the language of pagans. They pledged a strict observance of the Sabbath day and year. They promised to return all the interest they had charged their brothers (cf Nehemiah 9:38-10:39). All of this is discussed in the book of Malachi.

In 432 B.C., after a trip to Persia, Nehemiah returned and found that the abuses he had condemned earlier were no longer present. This was because of the preaching of Malachi. Malachi preached, and the people put away these corruptions and came back to God. This date of 445 to 430 B.C. agrees with the other facts of Malachi. Malachi does not mention Haggai or Zechariah, as he would have if he had prophesied earlier. At the same time, Malachi is not mentioned by either one of these prophets. Malachi said that the Temple and all of its services had been fully restored. There is a frequent reference about the disrespect to the Temple and its services by the people and priests. This would be especially true if he was writing about

one hundred years after they had returned to the land and eighty years after the Temple had been finished.

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, “How have we shown contempt for your name?” ‘You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, “How have we defiled you?” ‘By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible’ (Malachi 1:6-7).

They placed defiled food on the Lord’s altar. They corrupted their worship to God.

The Outline of the Book

The Outline of the book will give a survey of the book as a whole. There are six disputations (debates) found in this book (cf. Malachi 1:2-4:3). Malachi did not preach his lessons. He made charges. The people make a response. He answers the response and proves his charge. Before the disputations, there is a superscription to the book. “*An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi*” (Malachi 1:1). Notice he says “*An oracle: The word of God through Malachi.*” Malachi has only one thing to say which will be covered later.

Six Disputations

The **first** disputation is about love.

‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. ‘But you ask, “How have you loved us?” ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ the LORD says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a

wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.’ Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.” But this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. You will see it with your own eyes and say, “Great is the LORD — even beyond the borders of Israel!’ (Malachi 1:2-5).

God’s love was asserted. He said, “I have loved you.” They denied it and said, “Where have you loved us? Where is the proof of your love?” God said, “You are still here? Edom, your brother, is no longer here. I despise the nation of Edom because of their evil and their ungodliness. You, I love. And the proof of that is that every time Edom tries to build, I will destroy. You will remain in the land. You will remain a nation unto Me. Therefore, your response does not need to be, ‘God doesn’t love us,’ but your response needs to be, ‘Great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel.’”

The **second** disputation is about honor (cf. Malachi 1:6-2:9). Malachi’s assertion here for God is, “A son honors his father. Where is My honor?”

‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, “How have we shown contempt for your name?” ‘You placed defiled food on my altar. But you ask, “How have we defiled you?” ‘By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not

wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?’ says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 1:6-8).

God was saying, “I’m not even getting the respect the Persian governor gets from you in your land.” That was a terrible indictment. Now here was the cure:

‘Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?’—says the LORD Almighty. ‘Oh, that one of you would just shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will accept no offerings from your hands’ (Malachi 1:9-10).

God wanted somebody to just shut the church door. He said, “I am tired of this people coming in here and offering what I have not wanted. I don’t want their leftovers. I want them. I want their heart.” So He condemned their worship and told them to just shut the doors.

‘My name is great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘But you profane it by saying of the LORD’s table, “It is defiled,” and of its food, “it is contemptible.” And you say, “What a burden!” and you sniff at it contemptuously,’ says the LORD Almighty. When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?’ says the LORD. ‘Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a

blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king, ' says the LORD Almighty, 'and my name is to be feared among the nations' (Malachi 1:11-14).

He rebuked the priests because they were offering Him their leftovers and not their full and true worship. Then he pronounced a curse upon these faithless priests.

'And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen and if you do not set your heart to honor my name, . . . I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me. Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will spread on their faces the offal (the dung) from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that my covenant will continue with Levi may continue, says the LORD Almighty. My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe at my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin. For the lips of the priests ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should speak instructions — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant of Levi, . . . So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law' (Malachi 2:1-9).

He had made the indictment — the priests were false and vain and offering vain sacrifices. And He had proven it by their activity and by their idleness in not teaching the people of God.

The **third** disputation is about faithlessness (cf. Malachi 2:10-16). The charge was — you have perverted the Lord's covenant. The intent was to show that there is only one Father. He rebuked their foreign marriages and said they had broken faith. A detestable thing had been committed, because Judah had desecrated the sanctuary of the Lord He loved by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. One of the prophet Nehemiah's main functions in returning to the land was to get them to put away the foreign wives that they had and go back to the wives of their youth, so that the land might not be corrupted and that the law might be honored. Then God said He was going to cut off everyone who did this. They had foreign marriages and frequent divorces.

Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. . . . 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith' (Malachi 2:13-14, 16).

God wants His people to be faithful to Him.

The **fourth** disputation is about divine justice (cf. Malachi 2:17- 3:5). They were asking the question, "Where is the God of justice?"

You have wearied the LORD with your words. 'How have we wearied him?' you ask. By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them' or 'Where is the God of justice?' (Malachi 2:17).

He said you have wearied God with these words that say the wicked are blessed by God. They were saying, "It is all right to do wickedness, because where is God anyway?" They did not think God was interested. They thought God was dead as far as any active work among them. They did not think God was looking. They did not believe God was concerned, and so they had the audacity to say that evil could be done and it would not be judged. So the question was: "Where is God anyway? All I see is that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer."

The answer is:

See, [The word "see" does not mean anything except "Look at this!"] I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, who you desire, will come,'" says the LORD Almighty. [What Lord were they seeking? The God of justice that would come and avenge evil.] *But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap, He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in the days gone by, as in former years. (Malachi 3:1-4).*

He said, "I am coming soon. You want to know where the Lord of justice is? He is coming. He is coming soon, and He is

coming to bring justice. But when I do, I will refine the Levites and make them as pure gold.”

‘So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against the sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,’ says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:5).

God was saying, “I will come. I will come soon. I will come to avenge the evil. I will come to cleanse the righteous, and I will come to judge all the wicked people who claim that they were the pious people of God.”

The **fifth** disputation in this book is about repentance (cf. Malachi 3:6-12). The message is that the unchanging God still demands repentance. Notice the Lord is unchangeable. He says, *“I, the LORD, do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty*” (Malachi 3:6-7a). The Lord is faithful. The people were fickle. He said, “I do not change, but from the very day of your forefathers until now, you have turned away from me.” The Lord is unchangeable.

The people even refused to pay their tithes.

‘Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.’ But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and in offerings. You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have

room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:8-12).

He was saying, "I will bless you if you will simply do what you promised. [This is the agreement they made in Nehemiah 10 agreeing to bring a tithe into God's storehouse.] You do that, and I will open up the windows of heaven and bless you in a way that you will not be able to receive it. I will make your land a delightful land and people will know that I have blessed you."

The **sixth** disputation is about serving God (cf. Malachi 3:13-4:3). The charge is:

'You have said harsh things against me,' says the LORD. Yet you ask, "What have we said against you?" You have said, "It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape"' (Malachi 3:13-15).

Their complaint was that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. 'They will be mine,' says the LORD Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his

son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not' (Malachi 3:16-18).

The Lord inherited these righteous, these who talked with one another, these who called out unto God. The Lord inherited them. They were not only His inheritance. He would spare them. How would they see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked? The same way they did with Edom. Edom was gone. Israel was here. The wicked would be gone. The righteous would still be here.

Now watch the judgment that was to come.

'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Not a root or a branch will be left to them. [This is not partial destruction. They are destroyed root and branch] But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 4:1-3).

This was the coming of the day of Jehovah again. And that day, as always, was a day of destruction for the wicked and exultation for the righteous. Those who revered the name of God would be healed. They would go leaping around in joy like calves out of their stall. They would trample underneath their feet all their enemies, and they would do that because God came to judge for them.

But then, there is finally the conclusion to this book. It is

the conclusion not only of this book, but of the entire Old Testament. These are the verses that say, “This is all God has to say. He has no more to say until the day of judgment comes and the Judge comes.

‘Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all of Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the whole land with a curse’ (Malachi 4:4-6).

He said “Look back to the law, look to Moses and listen to what he said. Look forward to Elijah until he comes. It is said that this Elijah to come is John the Baptist who was to be the forerunner of the Christ. Look upward for the judgment. Look back, look forward, and look up!

The Teaching of the Book

Its Theme, Its Message, and Its Comfort

The theme of the book of Malachi is that God loves Israel. In spite of all their arguments, disputations, indifference, divorces, refusals to obey Him, and in spite of their not keeping the tithe accurately, He still loved them. Malachi the person and Malachi’s message prove that. The message of this book is that God is not served by partial service. If He demands it, He demands it. God cannot be served by volunteering to do certain things. God’s commands must be obeyed. Faith does what God says. The comfort of this book is that God is on the side of anybody who is loving, honest, and reveres him. Anybody that reveres God will be owned by God, possessed and ruled by God.

Its Permanent Lessons

There are **three** permanent lessons in this book. **First**, divorce is an abomination in God's sight. **Second**, insincerity in worship insults God. Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Haggai, and now Malachi all teach this lesson. God does not want our external service. He wants our hearts.

Third, one of the great lessons in this book is that our giving is a measure of our spirituality. "God so loved the world he gave His only begotten son" (cf. John 3:16). That is the same giving that God wants from His children. God wants His children to be imitators of Him. Jesus said,

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

God is the great giver, and we are never more like God than when we are giving that innermost thing — giving hearts to God. God wants a broken heart not just torn garments. He is not interested in sacrifices or money. He is interested in what we show by giving. He wants hearts that are focused spiritually on Him. God loved Israel, and therefore, He wanted Israel's heart. He wanted their service, and He wanted their totality centered in Him. Give God the total being and find great peace in doing that.

MALACHI (PART 2)

Introduction

This is the last chapter in the study of the Minor Prophets. The prophet Malachi is the last of the series of prophets beginning with Moses who for a thousand years had lifted up their voices to the people of God in rebuke, in judgment for their transgressions on the one hand and in the prediction of the future, glorious, messianic kingdom on the other hand. By Malachi's day, one hundred years had passed since the Jews had returned from their captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem. The early religious enthusiasm after the return had subsided. Following a period of revival (cf. Nehemiah 10), the people had again become indifferent religiously and lax morally. This book is a call to repentance and humble obedience, and it is a stern call of judgment to the disobedient and the rebellious.

The Date and the Outline of the Book

The date of this book is between 445 and 430 B.C. The outline is a simple one. Malachi has six arguments with the people about love, honor, faithfulness, justice, repentance, and serving God. And then, the book closes with a final statement about remembering Moses and looking forward to the coming judgment.

The Teaching of the Book

The theme of Malachi is God loves Israel in spite of their wickedness. He loves these people, and He wanted them to come back to Him. The message of this book is that God is not served by partial service. They wanted to give God the lame and the blind. They wanted to give God what they did not want

or need, and God is not served that way. The comfort that this book offers is that God really does care for those who care for Him. God will defeat all of the enemies of and bring glory to those who revere, serve, and obey Him.

Some Special Studies From the Book

Contrast Between True and False Priests

Malachi gives four characteristics of a false priest. **First**, he showed contempt or despises God's name (cf. Malachi 1:6). "*A son honors his father and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?*" says the LORD Almighty. *'It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name'*" (Malachi 1:6). **Second**, they offered a polluted sacrifice. "*You place defiled food on my altar. . . .*" (Malachi 1:7a) Defiled food was the crippled, blind, or diseased animals. They were giving God their leftovers. They were willing to give God the animals that they did not want. **Third**, the false priests caused many to stumble in the Law. "*But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,' says the LORD Almighty*" (Malachi 2:8). **Four**, they show partiality to the preferred people in matters of the law: "*. . . because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law'*" (Malachi 2:9b). That was the false priest. He despised God's name. He offered polluted sacrifice. He caused many to stumble in the law. He showed an improper respect for people rather than treating everyone the same.

Malachi gives **five characteristics of a true priest**. **First**, a true priest held God in reverence and feared the Lord. "*My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name'*" (Malachi 2:5). The true priest fears the Lord and awes his great name. **Second**, a true priest spoke truth and righteousness.

‘True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin’” (Malachi 2:6).

Third, a true priest walked with God in peace and uprightness.

Fourth, he also turned many away from sin.

Fifth, a true priest had knowledge of the Lord.

‘For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty’ (Malachi 2:7).

Peter says that the church today is a kingdom of priests offering spiritual sacrifices to God (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-5). The church today needs to fear the Lord just as His priests were to do so in Old Testament times. The church must speak truth and righteousness. They must walk in the will and the way of God and turn many people by their teaching from sin.

The key thing that the Old Testament priests did was to instruct the people. They were to teach Israel the difference between the holy and common and to teach the law in Israel. When Israel was brought into the promised land by Joshua, the tribe of Levi was given no large section of land as their tribal inheritance. They were given forty-eight cities within those tribes, and there the Levites were to live and to teach the law so that they might keep the land that they were brought into (cf. Leviticus 10). A true priest today needs to be able to do the same thing — teach the Word.

The Sins of the People

The sins of the people are listed within the book of Malachi.

First, they were guilty of spiritless, routine worship

(Malachi 16-8). God told them that their heart was not in their worship. They gave Him the leftovers of the crippled, unwanted animals. He told them that He wished someone would just shut the door of the Temple so that no one could kindle fire on His altar in vain. God was tired of their worship. They thought that they were honoring Him, but there was no honor there when they were leaving their hearts on the worldly things. All God really wanted was their hearts, and He will take nothing less than that. That is what Jesus said about the Pharisees, “*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men*” (Matthew 15:8-9).

Their **second** sin was evil associations (cf. Malachi 2:10-12). They had only one Father, but they were marrying the daughters of men who worshiped foreign gods and bringing their god’s into the house of God. And because of that, Nehemiah said they spake half in the speech of Ashdod and half in the speech of Jehovah (cf. Nehemiah 13:24). Their language was worldly because their associations were worldly. Paul told the Corinthians, “*Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). I was told a long time ago, there are three things you can do with evil associates. You can convert them. You can become like them. Or you can leave them alone. These are the only three choices. If they cannot be led to God, the only choice is to become like them or leave them alone. And God told the Jews in Malachi’s day to leave them alone.

Their **third** sin was they questioned the justice of God. They said that all who do evil were good in the eyes of the Lord, and He was pleased with them. They wanted to know where God’s justice was (cf. Malachi 2:17). The number one philosophical problem in the world today is the problem of human suffering. “If there is a good God”, someone says, “explain the suffering of the innocent.” In reality, the only innocent ones would be Jesus and little babies. God is just. Look at history and see that all wickedness ultimately has been

seen as wickedness. When history records the names of great men, not powerful men, great men are always men who have been servants. If God is not a good God, then explain the cross and the existence of good in this world.

Their **fourth** sin was robbing God (cf. Malachi 3:7-12). How can anyone rob God? By not giving Him what has been promised to Him. God expects His children to give what they say they will. He expects them to do everything they have agreed to do. Everything belongs to Him. He has a right to ask for it all. The Israelites promised God that they would bring a tithe into His storehouse to carry on the work of the Temple, feeding the poor and the widows, and the work of the Levites (cf. Nehemiah 10). They did not keep their covenant with God, so they were robbing God.

Their **fifth** sin was being impatient for God to act (cf. Malachi 3:17;4:3). They were like Jonah. They wanted God to do it now. Whatever God had promised to do, they wanted it to happen now. God said, "Look, I am coming. You need to relax and quit pushing Me. You quit being so presumptuous that you think you can call on Me for the time to act." Faith does not demand that God do something at a certain time. This "name it and claim it" faith that is preached sometimes is not godly faith. God's children have no right to claim anything that God has not promised. God's children also have no right NOT to claim everything He has promised.

What Divorce Is In God's Eyes

The next study within Malachi covers divorce. Malachi gives seven details about how God sees divorce. **First**, it is a profanity of God's covenant (cf. Malachi 2:10). "*Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?*" (Malachi 2:10). When a man marries a woman, he makes a covenant with her in agreement with the covenant of God. In divorce, both the agreement with the man and the woman and the agreement with God have been profaned.

Second, it also profanes God's holiness (cf. Malachi 2:11). Judah had broken faith. A detestable thing had been committed in Israel and Jerusalem. Judah had desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loved by marrying the daughters of men who worshiped foreign gods. God's own personal holiness and the holiness of His place, His kingdom, and His church are all involved in everything that the person of God does. Man cannot take the covenants that he makes with God and with each other lightly. This profanes God's holiness.

Third, their actions of divorce caused their sacrifice to be rejected:

Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands' (Malachi 2:13).

God was telling them, "Your sacrifices are being rejected because of the way that you have treated the wife of your youth. Her tears fill the altar in honesty and integrity and in request for God's blessings. Your tears are filling my altar because I am not accepting your sacrifice. I am rejecting the service that you bring to me because of the way that you have treated this lady."

Fourth, it is treachery against one's companion:

You ask, 'Why?' "Why is God acting this way? "It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner and the wife of your marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14).

God was saying, "Remember that God is looking. He heard all your vows. He heard what you have said about that marriage occasion. He heard the constant statements of love that you made to her as you were courting her, and now He sees the

treachery that you are doing against her. He is still witness. He is still looking.” God is observing this.

Fifth, divorce is also against the very purpose of the home: *“Has the LORD not made them one? (That is, male and female?) In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking a godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth”* (Malachi 2:15). Why did God establish the home? Why did God make man and woman one flesh and one spirit? He says He was seeking a godly seed. If divorce runs rampant in the land, then the children are divided and perplexed and no longer a godly seed. God is interested in godliness manifesting itself in a nation. And it cannot, if divorce characterizes the nation.

Sixth, God hates divorce! He said, *“‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty”* (Malachi 2:16). Jesus said that there is a biblical reason for divorce — when there is fornication on the part of one of the members — but even when there is a reason, God still hates it (cf. Matthew 5:31-32; 19:8-9). God will recognize and allow something that He hates. He recognizes that this thing that was intended to be forever one must now be divided, but God still hates it. Surely He hates it much more when divorce is flippant and for selfish reasons.

Seventh, divorce is violence against the innocent:

‘ . . . I hate a man covering himself with violence as well as his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith ’” (Malachi 2:16b).

Divorce is not a trifle. Last of all, divorce is a cause of the person being cut off by God.

As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob — even

though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty
(Malachi 2:12).

He may still act out his religion, but very simply and very graphically he is cut off by God. Read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and find the sanctity that God gives the marriage vow and the marriage position. When one is married to a godly wife, it is the greatest figure of the marriage of Jesus to the church that can be found anywhere (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33).

The Qualifications of God's Priests

The fourth study from Malachi is the qualifications of God's ministers.

'My covenant was with him (This is Levi.), a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction (This is talking about the true priest, Aaron.) was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty' (Malachi 2:5-7).

What are the qualifications given here?

Number one is that a priest must have a message from the true God. He is the messenger of the Lord Almighty.

Number two is that he exercises fidelity in delivering that message — *"True instruction was in his mouth."* When he opened his mouth, what he was saying came from God because he spent the time in studying the law of God. The priests were not inspired as the prophets were. They held in their hands what God's children today can hold in their hands — a word from God. The priests studied and memorized that word. They wrote

that word down for other people to read. They were fully instructed in the word and the way and the will of God so that when they stood, it was not their own insights that they preached, but it was the true instruction from God. When they taught the shepherds who were tending the sheep out in the pastures, they could call upon this word that was in their heart. David was not a priest, but he loved to study the word. Read the 119th Psalm sometime in a sitting. It is a beautiful psalm on the word of God. In the midst of that psalm, he said,

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises (Psalm 119:147-148).

David said, “At nighttime I wanted it to be day so I could study and read what the priest had written down for me, so I could know what your word was.” The priest had truly instructed David so he knew what the word of God was. And now in the night watches he could meditate, by remembering what he knew and think again about the word of God. Fidelity in delivering the message was the work of the priest.

Number three is that a priest lived his life in harmony with the word of God. The text says, “*He walked with me in truth and uprightness.*” There is not only a law concerning Moses. There is a gospel concerning the priest. Anyone’s life that is not in harmony with what he preaches finally will not be heard. Edgar Guest said in a poem one time, “I’d rather a sermon walk beside me than merely point the way.” The sermon according to the priest is not only on his lips, it is also in his life.

Number four is that the requirement for the priest was that he have a zeal for giving truth and uprightness to the people. The text says, “*You have turned many away from sin.*” Deep in the heart of the priest is this message from God. On his lips is fidelity in delivering it. In his life is the harmony of it, but all of

that would be in vain and void if he did not have an urgent compulsion for people to receive the word that he preached. Deep in the heart of the servant of God is the desire for people to receive it. Paul told the Romans,

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

"For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel (Romans 9:3-4a).

That is genuine zeal. Paul was willing to have himself cut off from God so that his fellow man could be saved. And it is said of Jesus in the book of John that zeal for God's house ate him up. A priest needed to be consumed by his desire to serve God: "*Zeal for your house will consume me*" (John 2:17; Psalm 69:9). Jesus says, "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). And because of that zeal, Israel turned against Him and crucified Him.

The Day Of The Lord

The **fifth** study is that great day of the Lord. It was introduced in Malachi 3:1:

'See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, who you desire, will come,' says the LORD Almighty.

He does not describe the day there. He simply says He is coming to fulfill it. But in chapter 4 He describes that day as a day of divine fire.

'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble,

and that day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Not a root nor a branch will be left to them.'

Notice its discriminate operation. It burns the stubble, but it also purified the silver (cf. Malachi 3:3). So it discriminates. This fire that is being sent discriminates between the stubble and the silver and the gold. The stubble is consumed. The silver and the gold is purified. But notice the total operation of this fire. Root and branch will be destroyed. Israel's tree is going to cease. Earlier they had lopped branches off, cut it down and left a stump, and a remnant grew back. But this time the total tree, root and branch, will be destroyed. So there is the fire.

There will also be a healing sunrise. Malachi wrote:

'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall' (Malachi 4:2).

The requirement to be healed is to revere the name of God, to fear it and to hold him in awe. The result of the sunrise is that it will bring healing that will come in its wings — literally in its rays. As the sun shines down on man, those rays that come will bring healing with them. And notice the rejoicing that it will bring. They will leap about like calves let out of their stall.

What will the result be from all of that concerning the wicked? God said,

'Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 4:3).

That is the great day of Jehovah.

Malachi's Preparation For the Messiah

The children of God need to be ready for the Messiah that is to come. Malachi stressed first of all the true value of ritual (cf. Malachi 1:6-14). He said God deserved their honor. God's name was to be honored in His temple. God was a great King to be feared. There is honor and reverence due the name of God.

Malachi talked about the crime of divorce. The children of God really needed to correct the abundant divorces in the land because the Messiah's coming. Divorce violates God's covenant. It violated their covenant with God, and it violates the sanctity of the home. Malachi talked about the coming Messiah and His kingdom. He would come as a purifier of His people and a judge of the wicked.

Last of all, Malachi talked about the eternal discipline of the Law. He rebuked the priest for not expounding the Law (cf. Malachi 2:7-8). He warned the people for forgetting the Law (cf. Malachi 2:17 - 3:12). In this context, respecting the eternal discipline of the Law may be the most important preparation they needed to make.

And now a final reminder in conclusion of all the Old Testament and as a conclusion to the study of the Minor Prophets. "You remember the law. Look back to Moses. You wait for Elijah who will warn you of God's coming, and then you will escape the judgment that is come." The minor prophets ought to be read and seen as examples of what God teaches, to give light for the dark days and to give hope and peace in knowing that God has always and will always care for His own and bring them into eternal salvation. He will bring them into the great joy that is involved in knowing Christ and believing in Him.

Richard Rogers



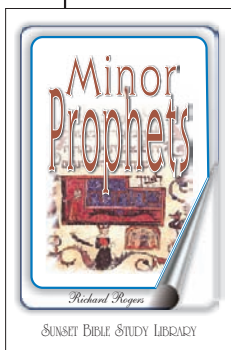
Richard Rogers was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. He was educated at Abilene Christian University and Florida Christian College. He was an avid reader, a diligent student of the Bible, and authored some twenty teaching workbooks and published outlines.

Richard was well known and recognized as a gifted evangelist, teacher, and lectureship speaker. Until his death he was in great demand as a missionary encourager and world evangelist. He taught for more than three decades at Sunset International Bible Institute, assisting in the training of thousands of preachers and missionaries. Richard mentored church planting teams in California, Mexico, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Richard preached for local congregations at Blue Ridge, Azle, Midland, and the Sunset Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. Speaking appointments took him to forty states and thirty foreign countries and to many Christian university campuses as a teacher and lecturer. He was also a frequent speaker at soul-winning workshops across the nation.

Richard can still be heard proclaiming the word of God via hundreds of audio and video sermons and lessons available through Sunset External Studies.

Richard and his wife, Barbara, were blessed with four children and eight grandchildren.



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