



**The  
Testimony  
of the  
Twelve  
Minor Prophets**

by  
**John Waddey**



**THE TESTIMONY  
OF THE  
TWELVE MINOR  
PROPHETS**

**BY  
JOHN WADDEY**

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## INTRODUCTION

Christians are people of the Book...the Book of God. God's book consists of two testaments, one old, the other new. While Christ's will for his people is recorded in the New Testament, we also respect the Old Testament as God's revelation. While it was God's will for the Hebrew people, its truths are eternal and of great benefit for us today. Without a working knowledge of the Old Testament we would be hard pressed to understand much of our New Testament.

The books of God's inspired prophets help us understand what was happening in Israel in the 800 years before Christ was born. They teach us the danger of apostasy among God's people and the consequences that sin brings upon people. They contain numerous prophecies of the coming Messiah and the kingdom of heaven. When we read our New Testament we find many quotes from those faithful servants of God and the fulfillment of their predictions is noted.

The prophets help us see what God expects of his people. In addition to faithful obedience in worship, he expects the same level of faithfulness in our personal lives and in the way we treat our fellow-man.

Prophets were God's inspired preachers among the Hebrews. In those men we see the kind of preachers God wants us to be in this Christian age.

In studying the life and work of the prophets, we must keep in mind that they were historic men who lived and worked in specific environments in particular eras of history. Thus to understand them, we must learn all we can about their times. Although their books, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, bear the stamp of perfection, the authors were men of like passion with us (Jas. 5:17). Hosea had family problems. Jeremiah's kindred were angered by his preaching and plotted against him. Jonah's hatred for the people of Nineveh caused him to disobey God. Habakkuk complained about the way God was governing the nations.

This book will concentrate on the life and work of the authors of those twelve books of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets. They are thus labeled, not because their message is in any way inferior to the Major

Prophets, but because of their brevity. In ancient times, they were all written on one scroll of scripture.

If you have not previously studied these twelve books you have a wonderful experience before you. The author has been privileged to teach them to eager young ministerial students over many years and to congregations as well.

To properly understand these ancient prophets the reader should try to imagine himself on the scene, observing them. Note the villages in which they lived, the way they dressed, the occupations of them and their hearers. Try to understand the issues they confronted, the moral and spiritual challenges and the social and political problems that confronted them. See the dusty unpaved roads, the sights, sounds and smells of the market places where they confronted their audiences. With this background in mind, you are now ready to read and understand these great men of God.

It is the author's wish and purpose to provide the needed background information on each of these books so you can make their contents yours.

John Waddey

Sept. 20, 2010



## HOSEA

### The Broken Hearted Prophet

The first of the twelve Minor Prophets is Hosea. Based on his personal domestic tragedy, he delivered a series of lessons that Dean Stanley described as “a succession of sighs.”

#### About the Author

Hosea was the son of Beeri, a Hebrew of whom nothing is known. No information exists on Hosea’s birth, early life or his call to the prophetic office. The name Hosea means “salvation” and derives from the same Hebrew root as Joshua and Jesus. The prophet was a citizen of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Hosea was a poet of the highest order. He was a deeply affectionate man whose heart was broken by the infidelity of his wife.

Upon God’s instruction, the prophet took for his wife, Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. Following their marriage, she proved unfaithful and left her family. Falling to the depths of immorality, she was finally sold into prostitution. With loving pity, Hosea bought her back and took her home.

Gomer gave birth to three children, each of whom received a name of prophetic significance. The first child was given the name Jezreel which meant “vengeance.” It foretold a day of vengeance which was coming upon the dynasty of Jehu and the nation (1:4-5). When a daughter was born, he named her Lo-ruhamah, which meant, “not pitied or no more mercy.” This signified that the nation’s day of grace was rapidly drawing to a close. Another son was given the name Lo-ammi which meant, “not my people.” This implied that Israel had forfeited her position as God’s people. It is obvious that by giving his son this name, the prophet doubted whether the child was his.

Hosea was God's spokesman to the northern kingdom of Israel. His message was concerned primarily with their problems and needs. Over thirty-five times he addressed Ephraim, the principal tribe of the north. They stood for the whole of the nation. He was the first prophet of and to the north whose message was preserved in written form, and the last to prophesy before the nation's collapse. Hosea has been called the prophet of "the decline and fall of Israel."

In his own domestic heartbreak and sorrow, Hosea understood how God felt about backsliding Israel who had betrayed Him with their idolatry. His tragic experience became the foundation of his message to his people.

Hosea was the first Hebrew prophet to set forth the great love of God that was later fully revealed in Jesus. His personal heartbreak taught him two unforgettable lessons: Jehovah's undying love for Israel and the people's unfaithfulness to Him. He boldly condemned the moral and spiritual degeneracy of the nation, using his own family problems to illustrate the depth of their sin. Hosea was a preacher of repentance, calling his erring neighbors back to God.

The prophet was a keen observer of his nation's foreign affairs. He noted and rebuked their alliances with heathen nations (See 5:13; 7:11; 10:14; 11:5; 12:1; 14:3).

Hosea has been styled the home missionary to Israel while Jonah was the foreign missionary to Nineveh.

### **Historical Background**

To understand the historical backdrop of Hosea's ministry, one should read I Kings 15:8-18:12. His work was done in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel. Thus the dates of his ministry were approximately 800-722 B.C.

**Socially**, Jeroboam's reign was one of peace, plenty, prosperity and luxury. His neighbors lived lives of ease, extravagance and moral corruption. The courts were corrupt. Violence and bloodshed were visible on every hand. Family life was rapidly disintegrating.

**Religion** was at a low ebb. Religious leaders eagerly joined the masses in their sin. Jehovah's worship was commonly mixed with the pagan practices of disgusting Baal worship. So widespread was spiritual ignorance that the people thought they were loyal to God when in reality they were but idolatrous pagans.

The **moral climate** was terribly degenerate. Swearing, breaking faith, murder, stealing, adultery, lying, drunkenness and dishonesty were commonly practiced (4:2, 11-12; 10:4).

**Politically**, Jeroboam II ruled Israel as a military despot. Following his long reign, civil strife and anarchy prevailed. Of the next six kings, only Menahem died naturally. Conspiracy was the norm. The nation was in the throes of death.

Mighty Assyria invaded Israel in 734, taking all of the land save Samaria, the capital. In 722, after a lengthy siege, Samaria fell to the troops of Sargon II. The Assyrians deported 27,200 Israelites to work in their labor camps.

Contemporary prophets of Hosea were Amos and Jonah in Israel, and Isaiah and Micah in Judah.

### **About the Book**

The book bears the name of its inspired author. It consists of a number of short oracles or lessons delivered over several years of the prophet's ministry and later compiled as we have them. Rather than logical arguments, the book is an outpouring of impassioned emotions. Dean Stanley styles it "a prophetic voice from the depths of human misery."

Many commentators feel that in terms of the language, Hosea is one of the most obscure and difficult books to interpret.

The prophet loved to make puns or to play on the meaning of words. The name of each of his children was prophetic (1:4-9). Because of the idolatry practiced at Bethel (the house of God) he called it Bethaven (the house of vanity) (4:15). Baali, a proper name for master would be rejected because it would remind them of Baalism (3:16).

### **Hosea and the New Testament**

Hosea is quoted more than 30 times in the New Testament, more than any other of the Minor Prophets. Some examples are as follows:

"Not my people" (1:10) is used in Romans 9:25 and I Peter 2:10.

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (6:6) is used by Christ (Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

"Out of Egypt have I called my son" (11:1) is used in Matthew 2:15.

"O death, where are thy plagues...?" (13:14) is used by Paul (I Cor. 15:55-56).

## **Hosea and the Liberal Critics**

Coming to the Bible with their humanistic philosophy, these self-appointed critics seek to dissect and discredit Hosea's book. They argue that all references to the Southern kingdom of Judah must have been written by some unknown Southern editor. Of course they offer no objective proof, only their subjective assertions. Those students wishing to read a thorough refutation of their views should read Gleason Archer's **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction**.

### **Baal Worship**

The root of the problem Hosea was confronting was the corrupt and degrading religion of Baal worship. Baal was the male fertility god of the Canaanites. He was symbolized by the sun and Ashtaroth, his female counterpart, by the moon. The word Baal meant "owner" or "possessor." The Canaanites taught that various baalim (plural) owned the land and gave it fertility. Baal and Ashtaroth were worshiped with ritual fornication, gluttony and drunkenness. Sacrifice of children was sometimes practiced. Shrines were built to Baal on high places, amidst sacred groves of trees. Ashtaroth was worshiped on the flat roofs of their homes. The sensual, indulgent aspects of Baalism was powerfully attractive to the Hebrews. It was the battle ground for Hosea, Amos and Jeremiah, as well as Elijah and Elisha.

The Hebrews who indulged in Baal worship never renounced Jehovah nor stopped worshiping Him. Rather they tried to blend the desired elements of Baalism with Jehovah's worship. Such a practice is called **syncretism**. It was totally unacceptable to God and soundly denounced by His prophets.

### **Hosea the Portrait Painter**

The prophet was a master at producing word pictures of sinners. He likened them to "adulterous wives (3:1); drunkards (4:11); troops of robbers (6:9); a half-baked cake (7:8); a silly dove (7:11); a warped, dangerous bow (7:16) and a wild ass (8:9)."

### **What Great Men Have Said of Hosea**

Across the ages literary men have been deeply impressed with the message of Hosea. We offer but a sampling of their impressions.

"We must reckon him among the greatest religious geniuses which the world has ever produced" G. H. Cornill.

“In all the world’s literature, there is no record of human love like that of Hosea” (George Robinson).

“No prophet of Israel outranked him in appreciation of the eternal mercy” (S. F. Cadman).

“For pathos and beauty, his book is unsurpassed in the Old Testament” (C. J. Harrell).

“His words are struck out on the anvil of a suffering human heart” (John Patterson).

“In coming near to Hosea, we come very near to Christ” (Merrill).

### **Keys That Unlock His Message**

Two **key verses** capture the message of the book:

“O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God: for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity” (14:11).

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely...” (14:4).

The **key words** are “return,” which is used fifteen times, calling Israel back to God and “whoredom,” used sixteen times to refer not only to their immorality but to their unfaithfulness to Jehovah.

The **key characters** are Hosea, God’s prophet, his unfaithful wife Gomer; Jehovah, the God of love and his unfaithful bride, the nation of Israel.

### **Purposes of the Book**

Hosea writes to make his people realize the awfulness of their sin and the jeopardy in which they stand (4:1-3). His goal is to bring them to repentance and restoration to God (14:1-3). He sets forth the great and wonderful love of God in hope of convincing his people of the genuineness of it and thus winning them back.

### **Exposition**

The book of Hosea naturally divides into two major sections:

I. The Prophet’s Personal Experiences (chapters 1-3).

II. His Messages to an Unfaithful Nation (chapters 4-14).

# THE FIRST DISCOURSE

## The Private Life of the Prophet (1:1-3:5)

The authority of the prophet's message is declared in verse one when he tells us that it is "**the word of Jehovah that came unto**" him. He marks his place in time so that we might know it is a true historical event of which we read – not some myth or novel. The days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and those of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, stretch from c.a. 800-722 B. C. Thus Hosea had an exceedingly long ministry – extending perhaps seventy years.

## His Marriage and Family (1:2-11)

The first divine instruction the prophet received was to "**Go take unto thee, a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom; for the land doth commit great whoredom, departing from Jehovah**" (1:2). This is the most difficult verse of the book. Three views are generally found among the commentaries:

1. That the words are to be understood **literally**. They reason that Baal worship had made sexual promiscuity respectable. Young maidens were taught to sacrifice their virginity at the altar of Baal. Multitudes of women were associated with the Baal temples as "sacred prostitutes." Hence they reason that Gomer could have grown up in that moral atmosphere as a normal course of things. However, most students of Scripture find it hard to believe that God would place such a painful burden on the shoulders of his prophet. Also, Jehovah's high priests were specifically instructed to marry virgins which thus excluded literally marrying a woman of whoredom (Lev. 21:13-14). Would less be expected of his prophets?
2. Some view the story as a **parable** with no historical basis. They interpret it as a literary device used to illustrate the nature of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Of course there are no indications that this record is anything other than fact. This is a purely subjective approach.
3. The majority of evangelical scholars hold that Gomer was a decent woman at the time of her marriage, but fell into immorality afterwards. She absorbed such an attitude and life-style from living in a degenerate society. This is the present author's position. This view is reinforced by the words "and children of whoredom" since they were not yet conceived when the words were spoken, the statement looks to the future. So also does the expression "a wife of whoredom."

He took for a wife “**Gomer the daughter of Diblaim**” (1:3). Nothing is known of his wife or her father save their names, her unfaithfulness to her husband and consequent fall into a degraded life.

### **The Children Born and Their Prophetic Names (1:3-9)**

Gomer “**conceived and bare him a son. And Jehovah said call his name Jezreel**” (1:3). Without question the first child was Hosea’s. Of the second child there is doubt. Of the third, he said it was not his (1:8-9). God gave the name Jezreel which meant “vengeance.” It signified that a day of vengeance was coming upon the dynasty of Jehu and the nation. It was at Jezreel that Jehu had smitten Joram, king of Israel and Ahaziah, king of Judah (II Kings 9:17-28). Evidently this punishment fell on Jehu’s dynasty not just because he executed judgment, but because of the fiendish delight with which he pursued his bloody task. Furthermore, Jehu and his descendants took up the very idolatry he pretended to stamp out (II Kings 10:29-31). To “**break the bow of Israel**” was to break their military power symbolized by the battle bow.

The second child that Gomer gave birth to was a girl named **Lo-ruhamah** (1:6). This name, given by God, meant “not pitied or no more mercy.” It declared that the nation’s day of grace was rapidly drawing to a close. It is perhaps noteworthy that the writer tells us she “conceived and bare” but does not say that “she bare him” a daughter (Compare 1:3). While the northern kingdom would be destroyed, God yet promised mercy and deliverance to the house of Judah (1:7). He predicts however that their salvation from the invading Assyrians would not be by their military power (1:7). When in 701, Sennacherib’s forces had taken all the South save Jerusalem and it was under siege, God destroyed 185,000 of the Assyrian troops in a night. It was done, “not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle...” (II Kings 18:13-19:37).

Gomer conceived a third time “**and bare a son. And Jehovah said call his name, Lo-ammi....**” (1:8-9). This name was telling for it meant “not my people.” This, with the fact that the writer simply states that “she bare a son,” indicates that Hosea believed himself not to be the father of the child. But the name also declared to Israel that they were no longer God’s special people.

In verses 10-11, a ray of hope breaks through Hosea’s dreary message. He predicts that in spite of impending judgment on the nation, the day will come when the divided kingdom will be reunited under one king. It will be a day of great prosperity for the nation. They will grow to be as numerous as “the sand of the sea...” He then uses the names of two of his children to show that judgments can turn into blessings: “**Where it was said unto them, ‘Ye**

are not my people (Lo-ammi), it shall be said ‘Ye are the Sons of the living God.’” “And the children of Judah and...Israel shall be gathered together... for great shall be the day of Jezreel. (The word Jezreel not only meant “vengeance” but “whom God soweth”). Thus God would once more sow or replant the Hebrews in Israel, their own land. This promise is most likely dual in fulfillment, referring first of all to their return from Babylonian captivity—as one people with one head in 536 B. C., then in a greater, grander sense referring to the Messianic age when all nations would be united under Christ. Paul makes “ye are not my people” refer to Gentiles who can now become sons of the living God (Rom. 9:25-26).

## **THE SECOND DISCOURSE (2:1-23)**

### **The Unfaithful Wife is Cast Out (2:1-7)**

This discourse opens with the prophet saying to his children that their mother is “**not my wife, neither am I her husband.**” The cause of her rejection is her “**whoredoms**” and “**adulteries**” (2:2). He speaks of stripping her naked and setting her forth as an abandoned child. To strip an adulterous wife of her clothing and drive her into the streets was a humiliating punishment practiced in ancient times and even in modern times in some Asian societies. To make her “**as a wilderness**” and “**like a dry land**” and “**slay her with thirst**” means that she would be left to provide for herself with no provision or support from her husband (2:3).

He then thinks of his little girl which God had named Lo-ruhamah—“no more mercy” and with a broken heart says to his children that he will extend “**no more mercy**” to their unfaithful mother (vs. 4). Here also he makes it clear that her last two children were “**children of whoredom**” (2:4).

Hosea was especially hurt by the thankless ingratitude of his wife. She boasted that her lovers had and would provide her “**bread and water,**” “**wool and flax,**” “**oil and drink.**” He tells her that those men whom she called her lovers, after using her, would leave her out in the cold. He reminds her that one day she will realize what she had lost and in her extremity she would wish to return to her “**first husband**” (2:7).

### **Gomer’s Sin Is Typical of Israel’s Unfaithfulness (2:8-13)**

The message shifts from Gomer’s ingratitude toward Hosea to that of Israel’s ingratitude toward Jehovah. They gladly took the material gifts which the



God of Abraham had given and then used them as sacrifices to Baal, the idol god of their Canaanite neighbors. We must keep in mind that Baal was the supposed god of fertility who was thought to provide crops and offspring to their herds and flocks. Forgetting that it was Jehovah who had really supplied their prosperity, they gave gifts that were rightfully His to Baal.

In view of this thoughtless ingratitude, God declared **“I (will) take back my grain...and my new wine, and ...my wool and my flax (2:9).** Like an unfaithful wife, Israel would be driven out of her homeland in shame and **“none shall deliver her”** or save her from his judgment (2:10).

Her feasts and new moons would cease because they would be defeated and deported by the Assyrians. Since she had given Baal credit for her fruitful vineyards and orchards, God would allow trees to grow up in them while they languish in captivity (2:12). He would **“visit upon her the days of Baalim”** (2:13). To **“visit”** is a common Hebrew expression for “judgment.” Baalim is the plural of Baal. There were hundreds of Baals as every community had its local Baal shrine and image.

We should probably conclude from 2:13 that Gomer had **“decked herself with her earrings and her jewels and went after her lovers”** and forgot her husband – and Israel had done the same.

### **The Discipline of National Calamity (2:14-20)**

Having promised to drive unfaithful Israel out of her homeland for her sins, God now tells them that his purpose in so doing is not to destroy them but to correct them and win back their love.

To allure her, and bring her **“into the wilderness”** looks back to the days of the Exodus from Egypt when He led the nation into the wilderness, not to destroy them, but to save them (2:14).

To **“give her...the valley of Achor for a door of hope”** (2:15), looks back to the judgment of Achor (Josh. 7:1-26). Violating God’s prohibition about taking the spoils of Jericho for personal use, Achan brought the whole nation under God’s disfavor. When he was exposed, his judgment was execution by stoning in the valley of Achor. Achor appropriately meant “troubling” for Achan’s sin had brought trouble to the nation. With sin removed from their midst, the Hebrews went from the Valley of Achor to win a mighty victory at Ai and ultimately to conquer all the land. So the judgment of Hosea’s generation by the Assyrian’s would ultimately result in restoration to their homeland.

When their captivity was past, they would call Jehovah Ishi and not Baali. The word baali was a legitimate word, meaning master. It could be appropriately used to refer to the true God. However, as they contemplated the disastrous results of their idolatrous worship of the Canaanite Baal gods, they would shudder at the thought of using such a term for Jehovah. Hence, they would call him **Ishi**, which meant “husband.”

The promised covenant with the beasts of the field, birds and creeping things means poetically that God will make the wild creatures of the earth to live at peace with the restored nation—not destroying their crops and preying on their flocks and herds (2:18a). To “**break the bow and sword**” is explained as “taking the battle out of the land” so they can lie down in safety (2:18b).

As Hosea was to accept his penitent wife back into his home, so God would again betroth Israel unto him (2:20) at the time of their restoration. That occurred in 536 B. C. when Cyrus the Persian sent the captives home to their land.

Verses 21-23 continue the description of the blessings God will bestow on the restored nation. Along with the covenant with the wild creatures he “**will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth.**” God will hear and answer their request for rain for their crops and the earth will respond with crops of grain, new wine, and oil (see **The Amplified Bible**).

“**They shall answer Jezreel**” is explained “**I will sow her unto me in the earth.**” Not only does Jezreel mean “vengeance,” it can be translated “**whom God soweth**” (see footnote). The meaning is when God brings his chastened and purified people home, he will sow them as seed in their homeland. We see here his delight in *punning* with words. For in this and the lines following he does so with the names of his three children. God will then have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy, i.e., Lo-rohamah. In that future day of blessing, God “**will say to them that were not my (His) people,**” i.e., Lo-ammi, “**Thou art my people...**”

## THIRD DISCOURSE

### The Broken Marriage Restored (3:1-5)

God instructed Hosea to accept his adulterous wife back into his home. “**Her friend**” of 3:1, almost certainly refers to Hosea himself (see the footnote). His willingness to do this, although not obligated by the law of Moses (Deut.

2:4), made it an act of grace. So God, although not morally obligated, would in grace receive Israel back unto himself.

The “**cakes of raisins**” most likely refer to “sacred cakes” offered to their idols. Jeremiah rebukes women who made “cakes to the queen of heaven,” i.e., Ashtaroth (Jer. 7:18).

### **The Ransom Paid (3:2)**

“**Fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley**” equaled thirty pieces of silver which Hosea paid to secure the return of his wife (see Cheyne in the **Cambridge Bible Commentary**). That was the value of a slave (Ex. 21:32). From this we can assume that she had become the slave of someone and out of his deep love, her husband redeemed her. One cannot help but see the analogy of God’s love in saving Israel from Egyptian slavery in days past and from Assyrian/Babylonian bondage in days to come.

### **Her Restoration (3:3-5)**

In all of Hosea’s words, we must see the analogy of Gomer’s infidelity and Israel’s unfaithfulness to God and God’s forgiving grace and mercy as seen in Hosea’s willingness to forgive and receive back his errant wife.

When Hosea said to Gomer, “**Thou shalt abide for many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be any man’s wife...**,” he was saying that she would be received on probation and providing that she would demonstrate true repentance and a changed life he would then restore to her full conjugal privileges. “**Abide for me**” in the Hebrew literally means “sit still,” implying she must stay at home and cease her “running around.” Similarly, the children of Israel would be detained in captivity, where true repentance would have to be demonstrated, before God would restore them to his home, i.e., the land of Canaan. They were detained, first by Assyria from 721-612 B.C., then by Babylon 612-538. In 536, Cyrus the Persian issued the proclamation that finally allowed them to go home.

Their days of captivity would be spent without king or prince, i.e., without self-government as they were political prisoners. “**Without sacrifice, pillar, ephod, or teraphim**” means they would not pursue their idolatrous rites of Baal worship:

1. Their captives would likely not allow them the privilege of worship.

2. They would realize that it was those practices that had brought them to their sad condition.

**“Pillars”** were obelisks, perhaps phallic symbols. They were forbidden (Deut. 16:22; Ex. 23:24). **“Ephod”** generally referred to the priest’s garment, but in context it refers to an idolatrous artifact as in (Judg. 8:27). Gideon made an ephod.... **“and all Israel played the harlot after it....”** **“Teraphim”** were images of household gods. Some of these were small enough to be easily portable. Rachel stole her father’s teraphim and carried them with her (Gen. 31:19, 34). Micah of Ephraim had **“himself gods, and he made an ephod and teraphim....”** (Judg. 17:5). Putting away of all their relics of idolatry would be one of the marks of repentance God would look for once they were allowed to come home. With contrite hearts they would seek Jehovah and **“David their king;”** not literally David, the Son of Jesse, since he was long dead. By metonymy **“David”** the founder of the Davidic dynasty stands for his line of kings. The ten tribes of Northern Israel had rebelled against David’s heir, Rehoboam, and chosen Jeroboam I for their king. All of which was contrary to God’s will. In the long dreary years of captivity, they would realize their great mistake and gladly pledge their allegiance to the dynasty of David and the kingdom of Judah. This they did when God restored the nation to their homeland in 536 B. C. The Northern Kingdom was forever extinct. **“The latter days”** here simply means in the future when by God’s grace they would return home. Cheyne in the **Cambridge Bible** renders it, **“in the days to come.”** Perhaps, typically, this could refer to Christ the greater son of David, but such is not the primary measuring.

### **A Collection of Messages to Israel (4:1-14:9)**

With the fourth chapter, the prophet leaves behind the analogy of his unfaithful wife. He records for us eight lessons that he preached, during his ministry, to the unfaithful citizens of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

## **FOURTH DISCOURSE**

### **The Cause of National Decay and Decline (4:1-19)**

In this chapter, Hosea blasts his people for their ignorance of God’s Word. That ignorance was the root of all their sins. God is presented as addressing his people. Hosea simply records His words. The **indictment** of the nation charged, **“there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land”** (4:1). The consequence of this spiritual ignorance is a breakdown of the

moral fiber of the community. **“There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery: they break out** (i.e., into acts of violence, Amplified Bible), **and blood toucheth blood”** (i.e., bloodshed is everywhere (Keil) (4:1-2).

**“Therefore shall the land mourn”** (4:3), is explained by the parallel line, **“everyone that dwells therein shall languish.”** Hebrew writers usually expressed themselves by repetition. A highly wrought poetic flourish is immediately explained by a more literal statement. The land, i.e., dirt rocks, and trees cannot mourn, but the inhabitants can. That birds, wild beasts, and fish are to be taken away, poetically means that all the inhabitants of the nation will be carried into captivity. Invading armies are little concerned with wildlife. Their interest is in the people (4:3).

Verse 4 is obscure. It is possible that the prophet represents the people responding to his rebuke by saying, **“let no man strive, neither let any man reprove”** to whom he retorts that they were **“as they strive with the priest.”** Moses had instructed the Hebrews to take all serious problems of judgment to the priests. The man who was presumptuous and refused to accept their judgment was sentenced to death (Deut. 17:8-12). Hosea thus brands, his hearers as **“priest strivers”** (Keil). Their penalty would be to stumble, i.e., **fall** in the coming judgment. **“Thou,”** the people shall fall, their **“prophets”** also would fall (i.e., corrupt religious leaders, not faithful prophets such as Hosea). Their **“mother”** was their nation (4:5).

Lack of knowledge had led their religious leaders into terrible sin (4:6-10). **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** This oft-quoted verse is rarely used in its proper context. God is actually indicting the priesthood for failing in their duty to teach the people God’s word. Because of their failure, God’s people are destroyed.

The sins of the priests were numerous;

1. They had **“rejected knowledge,”**
2. They had **“forgotten the law of God,”**
3. They had sinned against God;
4. They fed on the sin of God’s people;
5. They **“set their heart on their iniquity;”**
6. They had **“left off taking heed to Jehovah”** (4:6-10).

The penalties for failing to do their spiritual duties were:

1. God would reject them and they would be no priest to him;
2. Their children would be forgotten, i.e., not given the privilege to serve Jehovah as priests;
3. Their glory would be turned into shame;
4. God would punish them for their doings;

**“They feed on the sin of my people”** (4:8). When the Hebrews sinned, they had to bring a “sin-offering” to the priest for their forgiveness (Lev. 4:27-31). “The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it...” (Lev. 6:26). The priest’s job was to so instruct the people that they would go and sin no more. Hosea charges the priests of his day with encouraging sin because it brought them sin-offerings which they could eat.

**“It shall be like people, like priest”** (4:9). Again we see a verse commonly quoted out of context. The prophet means as God will inflict punishment on the people for their sins, so will he punish the priests who did nothing to discourage their sin.

**“They shall play the harlot and not increase”** (4:10), alludes, to the degenerate Baal-worship which even the priests had embraced. Baal, the god of fertility, was worshiped with ritual fornication. Priests and priestesses of Baal served as “sacred prostitutes.” It was thought that such rites would prompt Baal to bless their herds, their crops and even their wives with children. (See Jer. 2:23-28 and Amos 2:7-8 for similar rebukes).

Lack of knowledge had led the masses into idolatry. The **“whoredom and wine”** that took away knowledge has reference to their Baal worship (4:11). Along with the ritual sex were gluttonous banquets and indulgence in strong drink. Such sensual indulgences had numbed their minds to God’s truth.

The **“stock and staff”** which the people asked for counsel, refers to their idolatrous images (4:12). Rather than dignify them by calling them gods, Hosea described them as pieces of wood. “They prayed to a log” (Huxtable). Some of the ancient people had sacred sticks or rods that were engraved with images of their gods or magical inscriptions. Such can yet be seen in Africa. Nebuchadnezzar consulted his teraphim for instructions regarding the siege of Jerusalem (Ezek. 21:21-23). God’s people should have consulted their God in his appointed way, i.e., through the high priest rather than as their pagan neighbors did. (See Numbers 27:21).

**“They played the harlot”** both spiritually and literally by embracing the sensuous practices of Baalism. They departed **“from under their God”** can mean that they were no longer in submission to him. Given the forceful language in the following verses describing the idolatrous sexual practices it may mean as a wife, Israel is no longer faithful to her husband, Jehovah. She is not **“under him”** as a wife should properly be to her husband. She is **“under Baal”** (4:12b). Ezekiel used similar strong words. (See Ezekiel 16:30-34).

**“They sacrificed on the tops of mountains,”** in groves of trees when they worshiped Baal. When asked why they were going to those places and what they were doing, they offered the lame excuse, **“because the shadow (shade) thereof is good”** (4:13).

Their daughters and brides committed adultery by sacrificing their virginity to Baal. All the people, both men and women, were deeply involved in the wicked immoral practice. Because of it, their nation would be overthrown in judgment.

The women would not be singled out for punishment as harlots and adulteresses because their men were equally guilty (4:14). Moses legislated harsh penalties against adultery. Both **“the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death”** (Lev. 20:10). The daughter of a priest that played the harlot profaned both herself and her father. **“She shall be burnt with fire”** (Lev. 21:9). We can imagine an outraged father, husband, or fiancée demanding satisfaction for the sexual promiscuity of their given lady---yet those very men had themselves visited the **“holy women”** at the Baal shrine.

### **A Warning to Judah to Avoid Ephraim’s Sins of Ignorance and Stubbornness (4:15-19)**

The guilt of the northern kingdom of Israel is established. **“Yet let not Judah (the Southern Kingdom) offend.”** The offense against which he warns is that perpetuated at Gilgal and Bethaven, i.e., Baal worship at the shrines located at these sites (4:15). Bethaven is a pun made on the name of Bethel. Bethel meant **“house of God.”** It was so named by Jacob to commemorate the dream and assurance God gave him at that place (See Gen. 28:10-22). Hosea refused to call it God’s house because of the golden calf enshrined there (I Kings 12:28-30). Rather, he chose to call it Beth (house) aven (emptiness) which means **“house of emptiness”** (H. Hailey).

They swore **“as Jehovah liveth”** but they lived as though He did not exist. Also, their oaths were false because they profaned his name by their idolatry and ungodly conduct (Lev. 19:12).

## **A Picture Portrait of a Sinful People (4:16-19)**

Israel was **“like a stubborn heifer”** (4:16). Those who have worked with cattle can readily see the point he makes.

They would be fed **“as a lamb in a large place,”** i.e., in an open field without fences for protection. Thus their enemies would make easy prey of them.

**“Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone”** (4:17), i.e., mated as with a wife. He is hopelessly entangled. Let him be abandoned (See Jeremiah 7:16).

**“Their drink is become sour”** (4:18). This phrase is very obscure. It may be understood to mean “when their intoxication is gone they commit whoredom” (Keil). i.e., they move from one sin to another. More likely it means that their carefree, indulgent life has now been turned into distress and sorrow – even as the joviality of social drinking is lost when the stomach is made nauseous by over-drinking. Thus, once happy carefree Israel now retches like a vomiting drunk.

**“They play the harlot continually,”** i.e., their appetite for sin is insatiable. He alludes to their immoral idolatrous practices.

**“The rulers dearly love shame.”** They have no sense of shame. They pursued their vile practices as a young man does the maiden whom he loves.

**“The wind hath wrapped her up in its wings...”** (4:19). This means that they are caught in the throes of a destructive storm which will be their ruin. (Compare Is. 57:13 for the similar use of this figure).

## **FIFTH DISCOURSE**

### **An Address to the Nation’s Religious and Political Leaders (5:2-15)**

In this message, the prophet declares God’s judgment upon the priests, the nation (Israel) and the royal family (house of the king). By their wicked ways they had led God’s people into destruction like that of an animal caught in a snare. **Tabor** was located on the west side of Jordan and **Mizpah** on the east. Thus the whole land was caught in their destructive traps (5:1).

Verse two is admitted by all expositors to be obscure and difficult in the Hebrew. Translations of the words have widely varied. This is illustrated in the following texts:



“The revoltors are gone deep in making slaughter; but I am a rebuker of them all” (ASV).

“They have made deep the pit of Shittim, but I will chastise them” (RSV).

“The revoltors are deeply sunk in corruption and slaughter, but I (the Lord God) am a rebuke and a chastisement for them all” (Amplified).

“And excesses they have spread out deeply, but I am a chastisement to them all” (Keil).

“They understand from the very foundations how to spread out transgression” (Delitzch).

The general sense seems to be that he notes how widespread was the moral corruption of the nation, and that God, through his prophet, was rebuking all.

**“I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me,”** reminds them of God’s omniscience because of which they will not escape judgment” (5:3).

Six reasons for her judgment are set forth in (5:3-7).

1. They had **“played the harlot.”** By turning to Baal they were as an unfaithful wife and they literally practiced adultery in their pagan rites.
2. They would not **“turn unto their God”** (5:4). So addicted were they to their cherished sins that they would not consider forsaking them and returning to God.
3. **“The pride of Israel testified to his face”** (5:5). From the beginning, pride was the chief sin of Ephraim, the leading tribe of the Northern Kingdom. That pride was especially seen in their resentment towards Judah. They resented Judah being designated the kingly tribe. They resented removal of the ark from Shiloh to Jerusalem. They hesitated to accept David as their king. They eagerly led the rebellion against Rehoboam, Solomon’s son. Dr. Pusey in his commentary on the Minor Prophets devotes a page to the scriptural background of Ephraim’s pride (Pusey is published in the Albert Barnes Commentaries by Baker Book House). To **“testify”** means to bear witness or testify. **“To his face”** means openly or publicly.
4. Both Israel and Judah **“stumble in their iniquity”** (5:5). To stumble means to fall into calamity. The stumbling block that would bring them down was their iniquity. Ephraim, who was so self-confident

and sure of himself, would stumble and perish. Judah who had also taken up Baalism would likewise fall but later be restored.

5. They offered insincere and therefore vain worship unto Jehovah. They never quit their Jehovah worship, they just added their idolatry to it: such we call syncretism. Implications are that they might have been profuse in their sacrifices as a cover for their Baalism.
6. They **“dealt treacherously against Jehovah; for they have borne strange children”** (5:7). Like Hosea’s adulterous wife, who conceived with strangers, Israel had been unfaithful. As Gomer had borne children who did not belong to Hosea, so that generation of unfaithful Hebrews would bear a generation of children who would be even more disloyal and further removed from God.

The consequences for their apostasy are announced. God **“hath withdrawn himself from them”** (5:6), and **“the new moon (shall) devour them”** (5:7). The saddest day in the history of any people is when God gives up on them. The new moon comes once a month. This by metonymy means in a short time their judgment would come at the hands of the Assyrians.

### **Their Coming Judgment Described (5:8-14)**

In the Spirit, Hosea sees their judgment bursting forth as the Assyrian armies invade their land. He cries out **“blow the trumpet”** of alarm that the people may be warned. The invasion moved from north to south: first **Gibeah**, then **Ramah**, **Bethaven** and **Benjamin**. He predicts that mighty **Ephraim** will become a desolation. Notice his total confidence in his prophecy. It shall **“surely be”** (5:8).

God’s wrath, like a ravaging flood, will sweep over Judah because his princes (leaders) are like those who **remove landmarks**. To move property boundaries for one’s own advantage is an ancient sin which God always condemns (See Deut. 19:14; 27:17). Such was an act of dishonesty, greed and oppression. Judah’s rulers were like that. Note the simile 5:10.

Ephraim would be **“crushed in judgment because he was content to walk after man’s commandment”**(5:11). This they did despite the degree of their predicted ruin, i.e., to be broken to pieces. Such judgments were promised by Moses (Deut. 28:33). The reason for their destruction is also stated. They were **“content to walk after man’s command”** rather than God’s. Numerous verses warn against this danger. Man cannot direct his own steps (Jer.10:23). **“Cursed is the man that trusteth in man...and whose heart departeth from**

Jehovah (Jer. 17:5). “In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt.15:9). One “**man’s command**” they chose to follow was that of Jereboam I who said that it was too far to go to Jerusalem, hence they should worship his golden calves at Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:28).

“**Therefore**” draws a conclusion from the preceding. Because of their sin, God would be to the sinful nations as a moth, i.e., a clothes moth and “rotteness,” i.e., wood worms or termites, or dry rot (RSV). The picture is that of slow steady internal decay of the two nations that would ultimately destroy them (vs. 12).

When the apostate peoples realized they were in trouble, rather than repent and seek Jehovah’s favor and protection, they foolishly appealed to Assyria for help. Menahem of Israel appealed to Pul of Assyria for help (II Kings 15:19-20) and Ahaz of Judah requested help of Tiglath-pileser (II Kings 16:7-8). “**Jareb**” was a descriptive title of the Assyrian monarchs. It meant, “the warrior of fighting king” (Keil). Jareb could not “heal” or “cure” their wound. They had offended Jehovah. Only He could save them (5:13).

In judgment God would be “**as a young lion**” to the house of Israel. He would pounce upon them, tear them, carry them away as a strong young lion would his prey and no one would be able to save them (5:14). The purpose of God’s judgment and the exile He would impose on them is stated in (5:15), “**till they acknowledge their offense and seek my (God’s) face...earnestly.**” Thus the Assyrian invasion and captivity was not intended to exterminate them, but to refine, purify and salvage them.

## SIXTH DISCOURSE

### Israel’s Fickleness Rebuked (6:1-7:16)

By some, verses 1-3 of chapter six are attributed to the people who, frightened at his previous threats, quickly say, “**come, and let us return unto Jehovah.**” Others see these lines as the words of the prophet, speaking for God, inviting his erring brethren to come home to God. The former seems most plausible to the present author.

Verse 1 of this section looks back to 5:14. Like a lion he had torn them. If they will merely return, they surmise, he will heal them. “**Two or three days**” means they thought their judgment but a passing thing. Little do they realize that they will be deported and held captive upwards of 200 years.

Verse 3, **“let us follow on to know Jehovah,”** looks back to 4:6 where he reproved their lack of knowledge.

God then exposed their double mindedness, saying:

**“O Ephraim...O Judah what shall I do unto thee?”** We can see the Lord shaking his head in dismay. Their **“goodness is a morning cloud (fog) and as the dew that goeth away early.”** Their repentance was as transient as dew and fog (6:4).

God **“hewed them by the prophets and slew them by the words of (his) mouth”** (6:5). With vivid strokes he describes the preaching of his prophets to be like chopping down a tree with repeated blows of the ax, or like a warrior slashing his enemy with his sword. The message of judgment the prophets announced had been as clear as the light of sun. They could not excuse themselves by pleading that they heard not heard or understood the warning (6:5).

**“For I desire goodness, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings,”** looks back to their eagerness to appease their offended God by offering yet another sacrifice. God demands much more than outward ritual. He wants goodness and knowledge of His will which is reflected in righteous conduct. To properly understand verse 6, the ellipsis must be supplied. Thus it reads:

**“I desire goodness, and not sacrifices (only) and the knowledge of God more than burn offerings (alone).”** He does not exclude, sacrifices, rather, he stresses that outward ritual without inner goodness is profitless (6:6).

They had transgressed the covenant **like Adam** (6:7), i.e., with full knowledge of God’s will, and by choice. He alludes to Adam’s eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6).

**“There have they dealt treacherously”** probably indicates a gesture towards a hill or grove with its Baal shrine. Perhaps he speaks especially of Dan, Bethel or one of the other centers of idolatry (6:7).

Having charged them with treachery, he offers as evidence the following:

1. **Gilead** is **“stained with blood”** (6:8). Gilead was a district east of Jordan, but Ramoth Gilead was a city of refuge for the tribe of Gad (Deut. 4:43). It was also a city of Levites and priests (Josh. 21:34; 38). There, the innocent man who had shed blood was to be given safety. Being a city of priests, its citizens should have been workers of righteousness, but it was filled with

**“them that work iniquity,”** i.e., wicked priests. **“It is stained with blood,”** literally “tracked with bloody foot-prints” (Cheyne). Innocent lives had been taken there and not properly avenged (6:8)

2. **Shechem** was also a city of refuge and a community of Levites (Josh. 20:7-9). The priests thereof were as vicious as a troop of robbers. The roads to and from Shechem were notorious for highwaymen who preyed on travelers. The priests were no better for **“they have committed lewdness,”** i.e., outrageous sins (6: 9).

3. **“Whoredom”** was common throughout the land. **“House of Israel”** is the entire nation. Their whoredom was both spiritual, i.e., idolatry, and actual as they practiced the rituals of Baalism. To God’s righteous eyes it was **“a horrible thing.”** So familiar are we with sin, it is difficult even for Christians to perceive the heinous nature of transgression (6:10).

Judah will not escape the **“harvest”** of judgment appointed for her (6:11a). It is best to end the chapter at 6:11a. The last phrase is clearly understood when joined with 7:1. Remember that uninspired men have divided our Scripture into chapters and verses. Also the ancients did not use our modern marks of punctuation.

Thus we read:

**“When I bring back the captivity of my people,  
When I would heal Israel,  
Then is the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered  
And the wickedness of Samaria”** (7:1).

God’s grace and his desire to heal the nation, was frustrated by their wickedness. When the outer facade was removed, he found **“falsehood”** and **“robbery”** which stand representative of a multitude of similar sins. Worse still, was their smugness. Their hearts were hard, thus they felt no wrong in their actions. They did not think that God would hold them accountable. God does however see their deeds (**they are before his face**) and they will not pass untended (7:2).

In 7:3-7 the prophet, in poetic fashion, describes a typical conspiracy and assassination of one of their kings. We must imagine a royal banquet with the conspirators laughing and drinking with the unsuspecting king. When the king is thoroughly intoxicated, they pounce on him and strike him down. The RSV offers a lucid translation:

**“By their wickedness they make the king glad,  
and the princes by their treachery.**

**They are all adulterers.” (7:3-4a).**

He then uses a similitude of a baker to describe their plot of assassination:

**“They are like a heated oven,  
whose baker ceases to stir the fire,  
from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.**

**On the day of our king, the princes**

**became sick with the heat of wine;**

**he stretched out his hand with mockers.**

**For like an oven their hearts burn with intrigue;**

**all night their anger smolders;**

**in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.**

**All of them are hot as an oven,**

**and they devour their rulers.**

**All their kings have fallen;**

**and none of them calls upon me” (7:4b-7)**

**“They make the king glad”** with flattery or lies (7: 3).

The conspirators are called **“adulterers”** because they are disloyal, unfaithful friends and servants (7: 4).

We must picture the ancient earthen ovens in which bread was cooked. The baker starts his fire early so the oven will be properly heated when he is ready to place the bread within. The fuel is allowed to burn down to embers while he kneads the dough and gives the leaven time to work. This might take the night to accomplish. With the morning, all things are ready for the baking (7: 4-6).

**“The days of our king”** would likely be his birthday or an anniversary, for example, of his coronation. The assassins lead the unsuspecting monarch into excessive drinking. The king stretches out his hand with scoffers. Likely in his intoxication he enters into the buffoonery of his court jesters or that of his treacherous guests. Finally, when he is overcome with strong drink, staggering drunk or passed out, the evil deed is done (7:5-7).

**“All their kings, are fallen” (7:7b).** Of the kings of the North, Nadab, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Jehoram, Zachariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah were

murdered. (See II Kings 15:8-17:6.) The prophet paints a picture of a nation in the throes of death.

In Chapter 7:8-16, Hosea, exposes the folly of his nation. With biting sarcasm he shames the people.

1. They had **“mixed”** with their heathen neighbors and absorbed their forbidden vices (Deut. 18:9-14). They had made alliance with foreigners which God forbade (Ex.23:31-33). The psalmist bemoaned the fact that they had **“mingled themselves with the nations and learned their works, and served their idols”** (Ps. 106:35-38).
2. **“Ephraim is a cake not turned”** (7: 8). Ephraim, the principal tribe, stands for the entire northern kingdom. He likens the nation to a cake of fry bread that was not properly turned hence it was burned on one side and raw (uncooked) on the other. Such bread would be disgusting and worthless, and so was Israel.
3. Strangers had **“devoured his strength and he knoweth, it not”** (7: 9). **“Strangers”** refers to their heathen neighbors. Both enemies and allies had extracted tribute and concessions from Israel leaving them in a weakened state (see II Kings 8:12; 10:32-33; 13:3-7; 15:19-20). Social and religious intermingling had further weakened them and alienated them from their God. So darkened was their perception that they did not even realize their awful predicament.
4. **“Gray hairs are here and there (sprinkled, footnote) upon him.”** The nation was as men growing old, nearing the end of their existence. The signs of decay were there, but they did not notice them.
5. Their stubborn national pride would be their condemnation. It kept them from turning back to God who alone could save them.
6. **“Ephraim is like a silly dove”** (7:11). An Eastern proverb said **“nothing is more simple than a dove”** (Pusey). Not understanding God’s will or way, Israel rushed to Egypt for help against Assyria and then to Assyria for help against Egypt. Nor did they understand that both of those **“friendly”** heathen allies would devour them at the earliest opportunity. God’s thoroughly hidden providential power was using Assyria to chastise Israel. Isaiah provides a lengthy discourse on God’s use of heathen nations in 10:5-9 of his book. **“As their congregation hath heard”** through the preaching of Hosea and other faithful prophets, (7:12). **“Woe”** is pronounced upon the nation because they had **“wandered from”** God **“trespassed against”** Him and **“spoken lies against him”** (7:13).

7. When God sought to redeem them they responded by **“howling on their beds”** (7:14). Most commentators understand this and the following line to refer to them crying out in anguish because of the chastisements God was sending. It seems more likely to refer to their Baal worship which was an act of rebellion towards Jehovah. The bed was a major part of Baalism as they engaged in ritual sex acts. The Baal prophets **“cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives....till the blood gushed....”** (I Kings 18:28). Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint render vs. 14b **“they cut themselves for grain...”** rather than assemble to worship God in His appointed way. Baal, being worshiped as the god of fertility of crops and animals; their barbaric practices and the fact that Hosea was combating Baalism leads us to this conclusion. They were totally ungrateful to God. He had taught and strengthened them, but they returned his goodness by devising mischief against him (vs. 15).
8. They were **“like a deceitful bow”** (7:16), i.e., a warped bow that does not shoot straight. Not only is such a bow useless, it is highly dangerous. So was the nation to God.

Proud and rebellious, they made alliances with Egypt contrary to God’s wish. He predicts that they will be held in **derision** in Egypt when they fall to the Assyrians. Isaiah had a similar warning for Judah (See Isaiah 33:3-9).

## **SEVENTH DISCOURSE**

### **Judgment Is Coming (8:1-14)**

In 8:1-9:9 Hosea sets forth reasons why God must destroy the sinful nation of Israel.

**“Set the trumpet to thy mouth”** means to sound the alarm that hostile armies are near. Swift as an eagle, the king of Assyria and his troops will come against **“the house of Jehovah,”** which here refers to Jehovah’s land, i.e., Israel. He is coming to punish them for violation of His law, which is his covenant. Here we have a clear example of synthetic parallelism.”

**“They have transgressed my covenant,  
and trespassed against my law.”**

The Hebrew poets and prophets used this method of repetition to emphasize and clarify their points. There are several varieties of parallelism; synonymous, antithetic, cumulative, synthetic, etc.



In their distress, when the conqueror comes, they will cry unto God but it will be too late (8:2).

He then enumerates the charges against Israel:

1. **“Israel hath cast off that which is good.”** The meaning in the Hebrew is strong! It means “to cast off with abhorrence” (Pusey). The **“good”** refers to the good things of Jehovah: His law, His worship, His prophets, Himself (Ps. 119:68). These they abhorred.
2. **“They set up kings, but not by me”** (Jehovah) (8: 4). There is an apparent contradiction between this verse and (I Kings 12:24) where Shemiah the prophet said concerning the division of the nation, “Thus saith Jehovah.... this thing is of me.” God did tell Jereboam I that He would give him rule over the ten tribes (I Kings 11:30ff) and Jehu was anointed king of the North at the command of Elisha (II Kings 9:1-3). Both of them however proved themselves unworthy of ruling God’s people. Each ignored God’s will and turned to idols. All the other kings of the North were set up without consideration for the will of God. This included Jereboam II who reigned as Hosea delivered his lessons. Not one of the Northern kings faithfully served Jehovah. Homer Hailey interprets God giving them Jereboam I and Jehu in the light of I Samuel 8:4-7. There God gave the murmuring Hebrews their first king (Saul) but did so noting, “they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them.” He overruled their rebellious act to accomplish His ultimate will.
3. They had made idols for worship (8:4b); most notably the golden calves of Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:28-30). Samaria’s calf was unacceptable to God and would be destroyed.

They had sown the wind and they would reap the whirlwind (8:7a). To an agricultural people his illustration of sowing and reaping would be easily grasped. To sow wind is to sow nothing that is profitable. But from their unprofitable conduct would come to disaster like a tornado. Their sowing the wind refers to all of their senseless acts of rebellion and disobedience to Jehovah. The whirlwind refers to their destruction by God’s agent, Assyria.

They had **“no standing grain; the blade shall yield no meal: and if so if it yield, strangers shall swallow it up”** (8:7b). They had prayed and sacrificed to Baal expecting him to bless them with abundant crops. That false god could not provide their needs. Their crops had failed. It was a judgment of God. Famine is one of His “four sore judgments” (Ezek. 14:21). If by chance any fields did produce, the invading armies would take it. When he says **“the**

**blade shall yield no meal,”** the prophet plays on the sound of the words in his language. In our English it would be like saying “the flower yieldeth no flour” (Huxtable).

Verse seven closes with, “**strangers shall swallow up**” their grain. In verse eight, Israel is swallowed up. So sure is Hosea of his prediction that he speaks of it as a present reality.

Among the nations (i.e., Gentiles), Israel “**is a vessel wherein none delighteth**” (8:8). Comparing a person or nation to a despised vessel is a common figure in Scripture (see Jer. 22:28; 48:38; Rom. 9:21; II Tim. 2:20). The comparison is blunt for he speaks of “a utensil devoted to the basest uses” (Huxtable). In our language, he speaks of a “chamber pot,” such as was used before the invention of indoor toilets. His point is that Israel will be held in contempt by her neighbors who will turn away from her in disgust. This prediction has been realized in all the Hebrew people. Such is the essence of anti-Semitism.

Hosea describes his people as a “**wild ass**” wandering across the desert to Assyria asking for help from the very nation that was determined to destroy them. To liken one to the uncouthed and lowly ass was the same insult then as now. Also note that Israel would be like the ass, “alone by himself,” a sad situation for a nation in times of international war (8:9a).

“**Ephraim hath hired lovers**”(8:10) refers to alliances with foreign nations for which Israel had to pay indemnities (8:9a). God assures them that though “**they hire among the nations**” (i.e., make alliances) it will not avail, for He will gather them and begin to diminish them by the king of princes, i.e., the king of Assyria (Is.10:8).

In eight, verses 11-14, the prophet promises them devastation and captivity because of their ignorance of God’s will and corruption of his worship. They “**multiplied altars.**” In time of national trouble they multiplied sacrifices hoping to appease their God and convince him to save them (8:11). There was, however, no corresponding change of heart and life. The reference to multiplying of altars may well refer to the divine instruction that there be but one altar for God’s worship (Deut. 12:13-14). Ignoring the foregoing restriction, they had multiplied altars for the worship of Baal.

The “**ten thousand things of his law**”(8:12) is not to be taken as a literal number, rather it is metonymy wherein the definite stands for the indefinite and simply means the many teaching of the law. The KJV renders it “the great things of my law.” The teachings of the law were strange or unfamiliar to

them because they had not read or studied them, nor had they listened to the instruction of faithful priests and prophets. Had they heeded the command of Deuteronomy 6:6-9, they would never have reached this low ebb.

Verse 13 of chapter eight makes it clear that God does not accept every sacrifice offered. Only those offered with a proper spirit, pure motive and an accompanying holy life style are accepted. The same is true today (Matt. 7:21).

**“They shall return to Egypt”** (8:13). Egypt stands by metonymy for bondage. In actuality the place of their coming bondage would be Assyria.

Because Israel had forgotten God, he would deliver them over to their oppressors. Moses had warned them of this very thing (Deut.6:12-15).

## EIGHTH DISCOURSE

### **Captivity Will Come Because of Corruption (9:1-9)**

This sermon appears to have been precipitated by Hosea’s observation of the festivities of a harvest celebration. Hosea warns them not to rejoice because judgment is coming (9:1). He proceeds to rebuke them for playing the harlot and **“departing from...God”** as an unfaithful wife. Doubtless he was reminded of the infidelity of his wife. They were thanking Baal for the harvest God had given them (See Hos. 2:8-9). In their Baal worship they engaged in ritual fornication to stir Baal to give them fertility. The prophet brands them as being no better than the prostitutes who made their appearance at public festivities in search of money for their favors.

God would take away their prosperity and Baal would not be able to feed them (9:2). That was but the beginning of their sorrow for they would be evicted from Jehovah’s land (Canaan) and return to Egypt, i.e., captivity. In the use of this figure, he alludes to the bondage which their fathers endured in Egypt. The actual place of the bondage of which Hosea warned of would be **Assyria**. They would **“eat unclean food”** there. As slaves in a heathen land they would not be able to observe their dietary laws in which they delighted. Later, Ezekiel reinforced this painful lesson to the exiles in Babylon (Ezek. 4:12-14).

In captivity, they could not sanctify their crops by offering the first fruits with Jehovah (Lev. 23:9-10). Neither could they **“pour out wine-offerings to Jehovah”** in a foreign land. The wine spoken of was a part of the daily

sacrifices offered at the temple (Ex. 29:38-41). Their sacrifices would be **“as the bread of mourning.”** When a person died, the contents of his house, including the food, was unclean (Num.19:14). Thus if they tried to offer sacrifices in captivity they would be polluted thereby rather than blessed. While their produce could be used for this (their appetite) it would not be acceptable for worship (9:4).

The day of solemn assembly (Atonement) and the feast of Jehovah refers to the three annual holy convocations of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Lev. 23:1-36). In captivity they would not be able to observe them (9:5).

Chapter nine verse 6 is obscure in the ASV: **“for they are gone away from destruction.”** The meaning seems to be they will be led away from the devastation of their home land into Assyria. Again Egypt stands for their coming bondage. **Memphis** was the capital of Lower Egypt. When the desolations of war overwhelm them and they are marched away in chains, thorns, and nettles (briars and thistles) will grow up in their ruined homes and abandoned fields (9:6).

The **“days of visitation”** and **“recompense”** are the judgments of which the prophets had continually warned them (9:7a).

**“The prophet is a fool, the man that hath the spirit is mad”** (9:7b), has two possible meanings. It can be the words of the people addressed to Hosea, calling him a fool. Jeremiah was so called (Jer. 29:26). It might refer to their false prophets who claimed to have the Spirit of God and gave the people false hopes of deliverance. (Compare Mic. 2:11 and Ezek. 13:10). The latter is likely the correct view (vs. 7b).

Verse 8 of chapter nine is most difficult. The Amplified Bible renders it thusly: **“Ephraim was (intended to be) a watchman with my God (and a prophet to the surrounding nation); but he, that prophet, has become a fowler’s snare in all his ways. There is enmity, hostility and persecution in the house of his God.”**

This, view depicts the northern kingdom as failing in its divinely given mission and instead, becoming an adversary of righteousness. Another approach is reflected in the footnote which renders it **“Ephraim watcheth against my God.”** This suggests that Ephraim is God’s enemy rather than his loyal subject (9:8).

To stress just how deeply they had corrupted themselves, he compares their conduct to that of the wicked men of Gibeah who raped and murdered the

Levite's concubine. So outrageous, was their conduct that the entire nation joined hands to punish them (Judges chapters 19-20). Their wickedness had become proverbial. Since Israel of Hosea's day was corrupted as was Gibeah, God must destroy them (9:9).

The prophet declares that fruitful Ephraim will become unfruitful (9:10). The word Ephraim means "fruitful." Throughout this paragraph he stresses that God will make them unfruitful.

God remembers the early days of Israel's history. They were delightful to Him as fresh grapes would be to a pilgrim crossing a wilderness. They were as desirable as the first ripe figs of a newly planted tree. Their attractiveness had been spoiled when at Baal-peor they "**consecrated themselves to the shameful thing**" (9:10). This shameful event is recorded in Numbers 25:1-3. They sacrificed and bowed down to Baal and played the harlot with the Moabite worshippers. That was the first of a never-ending involvement with the disgusting Baal worship which Hosea was opposing.

Through Baal worship they thought to increase their fertility. God states "**there shall be no birth, none with child, and no conception.**" The "no" is not to be taken literally, but as meaning they would be diminished rather than increased. This is seen in verse 12, "**though they bring up their children, yet will I (God) bereave them.**"

"**Woe to them when I depart from them**"(9:12b). What an awful judgment, to be abandoned by God. They would face their hostile neighbors with no one to help them.

Tyre was a fortress city, thought to be impregnable. So was Samaria, capital of Ephraim. Yet, Ephraim would see their children slain by the conquering Assyrians. It was their custom to dash against a rock the children of those conquered (See Isaiah 13:16) (9:13).

They had sought to increase their fertility at Baal's shrine, but God would "**give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts**" (9:14).

"**Their, wickedness is in Gilgal**" (9:15). Gilgal was the site of singular blessings in the past. Gilgal was situated northeast of Jerusalem in the Jordan valley. There their fathers camped and ate the fruit of their new land. There they erected their monument commemorating their crossing Jordan (Josh. 4:19-20). There their first king had been anointed (I Sam. 11:14-15). Samuel solemnly protested their determination to reject God's rule and have a human king (I Sam.8:9-10). God showed his displeasure at their action by sending

thunder and rain in the dry season (I Sam.12:16-18). The rebellious Northern kingdom, their illegitimate kings, their calf-worship were all of the same genre as that ancient sin at Gilgal. Later, God said, “I have given thee a king in mine anger, and have taken him away in my wrath” (13:11). As the prophet spoke, Gilgal was a center for their disgusting Baal worship (See 4:15).

As Hosea had driven out his adulterous wife (3:2-3), now God will drive his bride, unfaithful Israel, out of His house, the promised land (9:15). Because **“Ephraim is smitten (and) their root dried up, they will bear no more fruit.”** This is another example of fruitful Ephraim becoming unfruitful (9:16).

**“They shall be wanderers among the nations”** (9:17), even as Moses warned. “Jehovah will scatter thee among all peoples, from one end of the earth even unto the other....and among their nations shalt thou find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot....” (Deut. 28:64-65).

## NINTH DISCOURSE

### **They Must Repent or Perish (10:1-15)**

Verses 1-8 of chapter ten are an oracle pronouncing judgment on Israel. God had blessed the Northern Kingdom with abundant prosperity. She was like a vine laden with grapes. Instead of thanking Jehovah for his blessings they multiplied their altars to Baal, giving him credit for their prosperity. The same thought is reflected in the second line of the parallel. The pillars were obelisks dedicated to their false gods. God will smite, literally, “break the necks of their images” (Laetsch), thus destroying them.

**“Their heart is divided”** between Jehovah, and Baal, between good and evil (10: 2). God has always expected his people to love Him with all their heart (Deut. 6:5). Then as now, man cannot serve, God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

When disaster befalls them, they will surely say **“we have no king”** (10: 3). They had rejected Jehovah as their king and their earthly kings could not save them from the powerful Assyrians.

They are further guilty of **“swearing falsely in making covenants”** (10:4a). Most likely, he refers to alliances the rulers had made, knowing all the while they had no intentions of honoring them (See 5:13; 7:11). Of course it would be wrong for anyone to use such dissimulation (Lev.19:12). Consequently, judgment will spring up like **hemlock** in a cultivated field (10:4b). (Compare Deut. 28:18) Hemlock is a bitter, poisonous herb unwelcome in the farmer’s

field. It is generally thought that the writer had not in mind God's judgment, but their judgments which should have been righteous, just, and fair were perverted into bitter injustice. Amos said the people of the North, "turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (Amos 6:12).

The golden calves which were so dear to the citizens of the Northern Kingdom will be a cause of distress when Assyria captures their land (10: 5). Jereboam I placed the calf images in Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:28-30). He said to the people, "behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." It is astounding that with the written record of Aaron's sin in making the golden calf and the harsh punishment resulting therefrom that Jereboam could foist upon them such a monstrous lie (Ex. 32:1-10, 19-30). The answer is found in the prevailing ignorance which Hosea denounced (4:6). He refused to call the site of the calf by its proper name, Bethel, which meant "house of God." Instead, to show his contempt, he called it **Bethaven**, "house of vanity" or emptiness. Those who once rejoiced in their idolatrous rites and festivities will mourn as they see the golden calf hauled away as a trophy of war.

Their calf would be given as "**a present for King Jareb**" (the warrior king) of Assyria (10:6). It was common in those days, when one nation overcame another, to take the loser's sacred images as captives to be housed in their temples. So the Philistines took the ark of the covenant and placed it in Dagon's temple (I Sam.5:2).

Samaria's king shall be cut off "**as foam upon the water**" (10:7). Samaria was the seat of government of the northern kingdom and stands for the entire nation. Their king, whom they trusted to lead and deliver them, would be as helpless as foam (frothy bubbles) upon the water. The Septuagint renders it "a chip" of wood. In either case the picture is of that which is totally helpless, without roots or foundation, swept along irresistibly by the force of the water.

"**The high places of Aven**" shall be destroyed and left desolate (10:8). **Aven** means vanity or iniquity. High places, refers to the Baal shrines with their altars. High place is from the word **bamah** and was something which could be constructed (I Kings 11:7) or broken down (II Kings 23:15). It is thought that the altar for the Baal shrines was placed on a platform or mound which elevated the sacrifices above the worshipers. Hosea noted that their altars were as common as the furrows in a plowed field (12:11).

When they experience the horrors of the Assyrian atrocities, they will "**say to the mountains, cover us; and to the hills, fall on us**" (10:8b). Christ said the Jews would say these words when the Romans took Jerusalem (Luke 23:28-

30) and John said the Romans would say the same when their judgment would come (Rev. 6:16).

Hosea charged them with the same type of wickedness as the ancient Gibeonites who raped and murdered the Levite's concubine (Judg. chapters 19-20). It was universally agreed that the Gibeonites deserved to be destroyed. Thus Israel's fate was equally just.

The ten tribes had rightly joined the battle to punish the wicked Gibeonites and all but exterminated them. It was a battle of righteousness against iniquity. The victorious tribes spared 600 Benjamites lest that tribe perish. Hosea says that wicked remnant is now represented in the Northern kingdom. The footnote in the ASV says Israel had sinned "more than in the days" of Gibeah. God will punish that present generation as severely as he did the ancient Gibeonites (10:9).

When God desires to do so, he will chastise them (10:10). He says they are **"bound to their two transgressions."** Two possibilities exist for the "two transgressions." It could refer to:

1. The two calves at Dan and Bethel or,
2. Their rejection of David's dynasty and their unfaithfulness to God in adopting Baalism.

The former seems to this author to be most preferable. This is reinforced by the word "bound." The footnote and the Amplified Bible render it "yoked." We can thus see Israel depicted as an ox yoked to her golden calves.

Continuing the imagery of the ox and the yoke, he says,

**"Ephraim was a trained heifer  
that loved to thresh,  
and I spared her fair neck,  
but I will put Ephraim to the yoke,  
Judah must plow  
Jacob must harrow for himself" (10:11, RSV).**

An ox would have loved the job of threshing grain because the law said "thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the grain" (Deut. 25:4). For the beast, threshing was much easier work than plowing. Prior to this point, God had been easy on Israel and Judah, but now they would face the rigors of justice for their sins.



The agricultural metaphor is extended in (10:12-13). They had **“plowed wickedness”** and reaped iniquity. God pleads with them to **“sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness; break up your fallow ground.”** Their hearts are likened to hard, uncultivated ground that has lain untilled for a lengthy period. To break up their fallow ground meant to repent and turn back to God. If they did so he could then **“come and rain righteousness upon them.”** Their sin was that they had trusted **“in the multitude of (their) mighty men,”** i.e., her warriors. She, like Judah, had trusted her military might rather than God (Is.31:1).

**“Therefore”** draws a conclusion from the foregoing. As a consequence of their repeated sins, a tumult, i.e., war will come upon them (Compare Amos 2:2). Her military fortresses would be destroyed as when **Shalman** (Shalmanezar, king of Assyria) destroyed **Betharbel**. No historical record survives of the destruction of Betharbel. Even the place is uncertain since there are several villages by that name in the region. It is assumed that he alludes to some recent event that vividly illustrates the horrors of war. So would Israel suffer because of their wickedness, as exemplified by the calf worship at Bethel. **“At daybreak”** means it would happen shortly (10:14-15).

## TENTH DISCOURSE

### God’s Tender Love for His People (11:1-11)

Again the prophet looks back to the early days of the nation’s history. The tender affection of God for Israel is vividly portrayed in this chapter as well as His deep hurt at their unfaithfulness to Him. When Israel was a child, God called the young nation **“out of Egypt”** (11:1). Matthew uses these words when he describes the flight of the holy family to Egypt and their return (Matt. 2:15). The context in Hosea gives no indication that he was predicting Messiah’s experience. The use Matthew makes of Hosea’s lines are what is called **“typical prophecy,”** i.e., the prophet’s words well describe what happened in the life of Jesus.

The stubborn rebellion of Israel is seen in 11:2. The more God’s spokesmen, the prophets, called Israel to follow God’s ways, the more obstinate and disobedient they were (Jer. 25:4).

One can almost hear the emotion choking God’s voice as he recalls, **“I taught Ephraim to walk; I took them in my arms; but they knew not that I healed them”** (11: 3). The picture is that of a loving father teaching his infant

son to walk. When the child grows weary the father takes him in his arms to transport him safely. Thus had God done through the years of the Exodus and wilderness wandering (Deut. 1:31). Yet his people did not comprehend that it was Jehovah who had so blest them. Isaiah used a homely illustration for the same thought:

**“The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his mater’s crib;  
but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Is. 1:3).**

The writer now chooses another illustration of God’s compassion. The picture is that of a farmer with his oxen. God, as a gentle farmer,

**“drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and  
I was unto them as they that lift up the yoke on  
their jaws; and I laid food before them” (11:4).**

Rather than the coarse, hard, leather harness, the gentle, considerate farmer used softer ropes, treating the domestic beast as he would be treated himself. When the great wooden yoke was heavy on their necks he would lift it to rest them and give them relief. He would set ample food before his ox that worked for him. So had God been gentle to Israel, and so had He provided their every need.

**“They shall not return unto the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be their king” (11:5).** Lest he be misunderstood, Hosea states clearly that they will not go into Egypt (See 8:13), rather their captivity will be in Assyria. The reason for their bondage is **“because they refused to return to”** God. The call to return was a major point in Hosea’s preaching (14:1).

**“The sword (of war) shall fall upon their cities” (11:6).** Sword stands by metonymy for the slaughter of war which was one of God’s sore judgments (Ezek. 14:21).

Their **“bars”** that shall be consumed refers to the great wooden beams that were used to bar the city gates. They will not keep the invading armies out.

Hosea’s generation was **“bent on backsliding” (11:7).** Keil renders the Hebrew **“my people are harnessed to apostasy from me,”** as we would say. **“they, were bound and determined to abandon God.”**

**“Though they (the prophets) call them (Israel) to him (God) that is on high, none at all will exalt him” (11:7b).** What a sad portrait of that nation that had been chosen to be God’s covenant people.

Verses 8-11 of chapter 11 describe in highly emotional terms God's inner feelings as he is torn between punishing Israel as justice demands or sparing them as love would do. Huxtable calls this "one of the most pathetic passages in all Scripture." Doubtless it prompted A. B. Davidson to describe the book as "a succession of sobs." God asks plaintively, "**how shall I give thee up Ephraim?**" We can imagine a grieving father wrestling with such a decision with his only son who had gone astray.

**Admah** and **Zeboiim** were cities of the plain of Jordan that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23). The merciful God could not bear the thought of destroying Israel as He had those degenerate heathen cities (11:8b).

Using anthropomorphisms, (that is, depicting himself as a man so we could understand), God said, "**my heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together**" (11:8c). The RSV beautifully captured the essence of these lines.

"My heart recoils within me,

My compassion grows warm and tender."

"The tenderness of the Father overcame the austerity of the Judge" (Pusey).

God would not give them the justice they rightly deserved, for that would have utterly destroyed them. Rather, He will send them into captivity to refine and purify them and then restore them to their homeland (11:9-11). "**I am God not man**" suggests that if he were a human judge, bound by human law, he would have to order their destruction. Being God, he can exercise mercy. This did not mean that they would escape all punishment only that they would not taste the full "**fierceness of his anger**" and be totally destroyed (11:9).

In future years, "**They will walk after Jehovah,**" i.e., the hearts of the people will turn back to God. Jehovah will roar like a lion and the Hebrews, scattered throughout the land of their captivity, will hear the welcome voice and come with trembling hearts to dwell once more in the homeland (11: 10-11). Egypt stands symbolically for captivity. Assyria is the actual place of confinement. The Northern Kingdom was taken captive in two successive phases. In c.a. 734 B.C., Tiglath-pileser carried away the trans-Jordanic tribes and those of Galilee (I Chron. 5:26; II Kings 15:29). In 722 B.C., Samaria fell to Sargon II after a lengthy siege launched by Shalmaneser IV. They languished in captivity until 536 B. C. when they were allowed to return home with the remnant of Judah through the benevolent policy of Cyrus, King of Persia.

## ELEVENTH DISCOURSE

### Ephraim's Many Sins Recounted (11:12-13: 16)

Our chapter division between eleven and twelve is unfortunate. The new lesson begins at (11:12) as in the Hebrew Bible. The twelfth chapter is devoted to a catalogue of the nation's sins which demonstrate that her coming judgment is justly deserved.

The prophet sees God standing among his people. Everywhere he looks He sees lies. To **"compass"** means to encircle. The problem was not unique to Hosea's day. The Psalmist said in his haste that "all men are liars" (Ps. 116:11). The latter prophets continually rebuked the citizens of Judah for lying. Verse 12b in the ASV says that Judah **"is yet faithful with the Holy One."** They stood in contrast to apostate Israel. However, the footnote reads, "Judah is yet unstedfast with God." The **Amplified Bible** agrees with the latter reading as does Cheyne, H. Haily, Keil, etc. Chapter 12:2 verifies this view.

**"Ephraim feedeth on wind and followeth the east wind"** (12: 1). The east wind is Assyria. Her covenant or alliance with Assyria (II Kings 15:17-19) would be as useful for the nation as wind would be for a starving man. They also had made alliances with Egypt (II Kings 17:4). Such alliances with heathen nations were strictly forbidden (Deut. 7:2). Israel multiplied lies in making alliances with no intention of honoring them except for her own advantage.

God's controversy was with both Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Jacob (the Northern Kingdom) (12:2). Jacob is used by metonymy; the father of the tribes stands for his descendants. Both nations will be punished according to their doings. In the words of Paul, what they have sown, they will reap (Gal. 6:7).

The use of the name Jacob for the Northern Kingdom in verse 2 reminds Hosea of the patriarch Jacob. He uses two illustrations to show Jacob's earnest desire to receive God's blessing. He then proceeds to show that the nation had not followed the godly example of Jacob but had taken up the ungodly practices of the heathen Canaanites.

**"In the womb (Jacob) took his brother by the heel"** (12:3). See the event recorded in (Gen. 25:23-26). This strange event was taken prophetically to mean that Jacob would supplant Esau. Jacob's "high regard for the birthright

and his desire to obtain it...was demonstrated in the hard bargain he drove with Esau in order to possess it” (Gen. 25:27-34).

**“In his manhood (Jacob) had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him at Bethel...”** (12: 3b-4). This looks back to the time which Jacob on his return from Padan-Aram, wrestled through the night with the angel of Jehovah and prevailed (Gen. 32:22-32). Jacob would not let the angel go except he bless him. Through weeping and prayer, Jacob found strength and favor with Jehovah. Hosea is urging his neighbors to follow Jacob’s righteous example in seeking God’s favor. It is theirs by promise if they will but claim it.

The angel with whom Jacob wrestled was said to be God (Gen. 32:28). This mysterious person is met repeatedly in the Old Testament, beginning with the appearance to Abraham at Mamre (Gen. 18:1-33). He was in the burning bush and spoke to Moses (Ex. 3:2-5). His name was I AM (3:14). Jesus claimed that **he** was “I am” (John 8:58). Paul said that it was Christ who supplied Israel’s needs in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:4). Those wishing to pursue this fascinating study further should consult H. P. Lidden’s **The Divinity of Our Lord or Studies in Theology** by Loraine Boettner. See also the author’s discussion of **The Angel of Jehovah** in Appendix A at the conclusion of the notes on Zechariah.

There at Bethel, Jehovah revealed himself to Jacob the father of Hebrew nation (**spake with us**) (12: 4b). Before God gave Moses the written message of the law, on Sinai, He spoke “unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners” (Heb. 1:1). The fathers were expected to pass along those revealed truths to their households and those that would come after them (Gen. 18:19).

Two names of God (12:5). **“Jehovah of hosts”** literally means the God or leader of the armies of heaven (Keil, p. 148). This speaks of his power to protect his people and to deal with his enemies. **“Jehovah is his memorial name.”** This statement looks back to Exodus 3:13-15. Moses was instructed to tell the Hebrews slaves in Egypt, that “Jehovah, the God of your fathers.... Abraham....Isaac and Jacob hath sent” him unto them. God’s name was revealed to Moses as “I AM THAT I AM.” The footnote offers the alternative, “I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE.” Pusey notes that, “I AM,” expresses His unchangeableness.” Thus the unchanging God that spoke to Abraham had spoken to Moses and was now speaking to Israel through Hosea. He was reliable and dependable. Both his demands and his blessings were the same for Hosea’s generation as for the fathers of the nation. The words Jehovah and

I AM come from the same Hebrew root word *YHWH*. By this sacred name Jehovah revealed himself to Israel as their covenant God. To the Hebrews, the word we pronounce “Jehovah” was an unspeakable name. In their superstition, they feared they might mispronounce it and thus offend God. Hence when they came across the Hebrew word YHWH they would substitute the word Adonai (Lord). At first YHWH was pronounced only in the temple precincts, but by 322 B.C., in the days of Simeon the Just, they ceased to use it altogether (Pusey, pp. 119-120). Now the correct pronunciation is lost. Our word Jehovah is derived by adding the vowels of Adonai: thus we get YaHoWah which we anglicize to Jehovah. Given this information we cannot but smile at the Jehovah’s Witness organization that erects its entire doctrinal system on the name Jehovah. In theological literature, the Hebrew Word YHWH is called the Tetragrammaton. By “memorial” he is not just saying that Jehovah is his proper name, but it is the name that properly reveals his nature as the unchanging God.

The paragraph is concluded by a call to repentance **“Turn thou to thy God,”** and a charge to manifest that change of heart by practicing kindness and justice towards their fellowmen. Then they must patiently wait for God to work out his good pleasure on their behalf as did father Jacob (12: 6). The concept of patiently waiting on God was a favorite idea of the psalmists and prophets (See Psalm 25:5 and Isaiah 40:31).

Chapter 12:7-14 continues the list of sins for which the nation of Israel stood condemned. By reading the lines carefully one will note the following items of wrongdoing:

1. Deceitful business practices,
2. Oppression,
3. A self-righteous belief that they were above judgment,
4. Idolatry,
5. They had forgotten God.

He calls his fellow-Hebrews **“traffickers”** (12:7). A trafficker is a “merchant.” The word comes from the Hebrew term “canaanite” which had a dual meaning. It was a generic name for the earlier inhabitants of the land which Israel had displaced. It also identified merchants and traders. The Hebrews felt vastly superior to their Canaanite neighbors whom they viewed as godless heathen. By using this term, Hosea consciously rebuked them by saying that they were no better than their despised heathen neighbors: The reason for this blistering charge was they use deceitful balances (scales) in their business. Such was

specifically forbidden by Moses (Lev. 19:35-36). They readily oppressed the poor whom God had said they must protect (Ex. 22:21-23). They boasted of their ill-gotten wealth and placed their hope in it (12:8). Solomon warned that “he that trusteth in his riches shall fall” (Prov. 11:28). Their foolishness is seen in their boast that no one would catch them in their crooked business dealings (12:8). They had forgotten that Jehovah was the all-seeing God from whom nothing is hidden (Jer. 16:17).

Verse 9 of chapter 12 expands the thought of the unchangeable nature of their God. The same Jehovah who had delivered their fathers from Egyptian bondage and then sentenced them to forty years of wandering in the desert for their rebellion would now be forced to send the nation back into captivity (in Assyria) because of their sin. To dwell in tents as in the days of the solemn feast alludes to their method of observing the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:39-43). The festival commemorated their forty years of desert wandering. The thing he threatens is captivity in the land of the Assyrians.

In 12:10 God reminds the people that their judgment was not unannounced. Through his prophets, God had frequently warned them of the dangers of disobedience (Jer. 7:25-26).

Two cities are singled out for rebuke and judgment: Gilead on the east and Gilgal on the west of Jordan (12:11). This implies that the coming judgment would sweep across all the land. The **Amplified Bible** helps to clarify vs.11 which is obscure in our standard translations.

“If Gilead is given over to idolatry, they shall come to nought and be mere waste;

If they (insult God by) sacrificing bullocks in Gilgal (on heathen altars), their altars shall be as heaps in the furrows of the fields.”

Both Gilead and Gilgal were centers for the idolatrous Baal worship. “In the days of Pekah, King of Israel, came Tiglath-piliser, King of Assyria, and took....Gilead....and he carried them captive to Assyria” (II Kings 15:29).

“**Altars are as heaps in the furrows of the field**” means that their pagan altars will be reduced to rubble, like the piles of stones gathered out of the plowed fields (12:11b). Some take this to mean their pagan altars were as numerous as the furrows in a plowed field.

In 12:12, Hosea returns to his illustrations from the life of Jacob (See 12:2-5). Their father, Jacob, to avoid marrying one of the idolatrous women of Canaan, traveled all the way to Aram (Padan-Aram of Gen. 28:2), the ancestral home

of his mother, to find a righteous mate. But Jacob's children had eagerly embraced the corrupt paganism of their Canaanite neighbors. Jacob served as a lowly shepherd for twenty years to get a righteous wife (Gen. 31:38-41), but his heirs manifested none of his faith and conviction. The prophet speaks thus to shame them.

Moses was the prophet by which Jehovah delivered Israel from Egypt and preserved them in the wilderness (Deut. 34:10-12). God had saved the Hebrews from slavery and provided their every need for the forty years of their sojourn in the wilderness. They repaid him by provoking him **“to anger most bitterly”** by their rebellion and disgusting idolatry (12:13-14a). **“Therefore”** they leave God no choice but to pour out his wrath upon them. Their guilt would be upon their own heads. They would reap what they had sown (Gal. 6:7).

In chapter 13, Hosea warns his people that they are traveling a path of certain self-destruction. In 13:1, he recalls the old days when Ephraim, (the principal tribe of the northern kingdom), was the military leader of all God's people (See Deuteronomy 33:17; Judges 8:1; 12:1). So long as they were faithful to God, no enemy could stand before Ephraim's troops. But Ephraim **“exalted himself in Israel”** (13:1). When the leaders of that tribe sought to wrest the nation's leadership from God's appointed ruler, Judah, they offended God (See Genesis 49:10; I Kings 12:19). This was seen in their hesitancy to accept David (II Samuel 2:4-11) and in the revolt to the ten northern tribes against Rehoboam, David's grandson (I Kings 11:26; 12:19). Ephraim was the leader in that rebellion and became the center of government for the breakaway kingdom. That was the first major step toward their destruction.

When Ephraim **“offended in Baal, he died”** (13:1b). A whole range of events occurred in which the northern nation embraced the corrupt worship of Baal. Two most notable steps were the introduction of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel by Jereboam I (I Kings 12:28-31) and the attempt by Ahab and Jezebel to impose Baalism and stamp out Jehovah's worship (I Kings 16:29-33; 18:4; 19:9-10).

By Hosea's time (c.a. 750-725 B. C.) the situation had gone from bad to worse. Idolatry was endemic in the land (13:2). He singles out for ridicule and rebuke, one disgusting practice of the Baalites: **“Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.”** He doubtless refers to the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:28). Elijah was faced with the same idolatrous practice (I Kings 19:18). It is no less disgusting to see worshipers in our day kiss the toe of Peter's image in the Vatican or kiss the ring of the Roman bishops. Other



practices of Baal worship included priests leaping about the altars, crying aloud and cutting themselves with knives (I Kings 18:26-28). Also involved in the Baal culture were sexual rites involving both men and women, both heterosexual and homosexual activity (Jer. 2:20; II Kings 23:5-7). In so doing, they sought to invoke the blessings of Baal on their crops and herds.

Because of their wickedness they would pass away as surely as **“the morning cloud,”** i.e., the fog, and the dew that evaporates with the coming of the sun. Their instability would be as the chaff of the threshing floor before the wind and as the smoke of a fire (13:3).

Verses 4 and 5 of chapter 13 remind the Hebrews that except for Jehovah they would still be slaves in Egypt. One of the conditions set by God when he delivered them was that they “know no god but me;” or in words of the decalogue, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7). He reminds them that **“there is no savior”** besides Jehovah (13:4b). Isaiah proclaimed that same truth in the Southern Kingdom (Is. 43:11). This was spoken to remind them of the futility of looking to Baal for help or deliverance. Jehovah, not Baal, had led them safely through the great wilderness for forty years. He had provided their every need in that desolate land (Deut. 8:3-4; 29:5; 32:7-10). In spite of all the blessings they had received from God’s hand, they showed nothing but ingratitude. **“Therefore have they forgotten me”** (God) (13:6b). These words are a summary of Moses’ warning to Israel. “Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou, art become slick; then, he forsook God who made him...” (Deut. 32:12-18). As a consequence of their ingratitude and sin, God their savior was now to be **“as a lion,” “as a leopard,” “as an angry bear”** to attack and destroy them (13:7-8).

With thundering tones, Hosea pronounces their doom: **“It is thy destruction that thou art against me, against thy help”** (13:9). No man or nation can fight against God or even reject him and expect to win. He chides them by asking sarcastically, **“Where now is thy king that the may save thee...?”** (13:10). They had reasoned that having a king was essential for their military security (I Sam. 8:19-20). Now that mighty Assyria was looming ever larger on their borders, he reminds them that only God, not their king, could deliver them (13:10-11). Verse 11 gives us insight into God’s action in allowing the nation to have their first king, Saul, and in His allowing the ten tribes to successfully revolt. Such was not His will; rather he allowed it to happen, reserving judgment for a later date. He said to Samuel regarding their clamor for a human king, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me that I should not be king over them” (I Sam. 8:7).

**“The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up”** is explained by the parallel line following: **“His sin is laid up in store”** (13:12). The meaning is that every sin is being laid up for proper punishment. God will not forget their transgressions. **“Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward”** (Hebrews 2:2).

Verse 13 of chapter 13 is hopelessly obscure in the older translations. The **Amplified Bible** makes Hosea’s meaning clear:

**“The pains of a woman in childbirth are coming on for him (to be born); but he is an unwise son, for now, when it is time (to be born), he comes not to the place where unborn children break forth – he needs (a) new birth, but makes no effort to acquire it.”** Israel’s inability to give up his life of rebellion and disobedience is likened to a woman unable to deliver the child when it has come to term. Not to do so will mean certain death. Hezekiah uses the same imagery: **“This is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely; for the children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to deliver”** (Is. 37:3).

Through the gloomy cloud of threatened judgment, a ray of hope breaks through in 13:14. **“I will ransom them from the power of Sheol...”** Under the image of a resurrection from the dead, God promises to rescue the nation from their coming captivity in Assyria. Ezekiel uses similar imagery to describe the rescue and restoration of his people from Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 37:1-14). **Sheol** in this passage is synonymous with **death**; note the parallelism:

**“O death, where are thy plagues?**

**O Sheol, where is thy destruction?”** (13:14).

Paul uses these lines in his glorious paean celebrating Christ’s victory over death through the resurrection (I Cor. 15:55).

**“Repentance shall be hid from my eyes”** refers to the foregoing promise to ransom them from captivity. God has made the promise to do so and under no circumstances will he change his mind. The captives will come home. In the words of the author of Hebrews, **“it is impossible for God to lie”** (Heb. 6:18).

**“Though he be fruitful”** is a veiled allusion to Ephraim whose name means fruitful (13:15). Although at the moment the Northern Kingdom appeared strong and permanent, the east wind, i.e., breath of Jehovah would dry them up and destroy them. That east wind would be Assyria’s invading army. Their

destructiveness is likened to the hot burning winds that come from the Arabian desert, scorching the vegetation in Israel.

He closes the chapter with the solemn warning, **“Samaria will bear her guilt; for she hath rebelled against her God”** (13:16). Samaria, the capital of the north stands for the whole nation. The brutality of the Assyrians is seen in the description of their war practices: **“infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.”** For such atrocities they were renowned and feared.

## ELEVENTH DISCOURSE

### God’s Final Plea to His People (14:1-9)

In 14:1-3 , we see a fervent appeal to the citizens of Northern Israel to repent while they can and confess their sins to the God they had offended.

**“Take with you words,”** means to come back to God with words of confession. Rather than bullocks God wanted genuine confession of sins, i.e., **“the offering of our lips”** (14:2). Among the things that needed to be confessed were:

1. Their foreign alliances (**“Assyria shall not save us”**).
2. Their dependence on military strength (**“we will not ride upon horses”**).
3. Their idolatry (**“neither will we say to the work of our hands, ye are our gods”**). In Jehovah alone would mercy be found (3b).

Verses 4-7 of chapter 14 are a lovely promise of forgiveness and restoration. **“I (God) will heal their backsliding...”** they will one day be strong and stable as the great cedars on Mt. Lebanon. The phrase, **“they that dwell under his shadow”** is speaking of the citizens of the restored nation once more living under God’s care and protection. His providential care is spreads over them like the cedars of Lebanon cover all beneath them (14:7).

After the bitter experience of captivity the Hebrew, will once and forever renounce idolatry saying, **“What have I to do any more with idols?”** (14:8).

The moral of this grand book is stated 14:9: **“Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Prudent, that he may know them? For the ways**

**of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein.”**

## **SOME LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- Nothing can quench God’s love for his people.
- It brings intense pain and sorrow to Jehovah when his people desert him.
- We see the sacredness and sanctity of marriage reflected in our relationship with Jehovah.
- When the leaders of a nation become degenerate, the whole society quickly follows.
- Internal corruption is more dangerous to a nation than her external enemies.
- Corruption in politics is bad, but in religion it is inexcusable.
- The root of all sin is unfaithfulness to God.
- We see the danger of following untrustworthy teachers.
- Genuine repentance will bring forgiveness and full restoration to Jehovah’s favor.
- From Hosea we learn the beauty of forgiving those who sin against us.
- May we not be half-baked Christians—burned on one side, mushy on top; therefore useless (7:8).
- Our goodness must be more permanent than the morning mist and dew (6:4).
- Let us, like Hosea, be a living demonstration of our message.
- God still prefers goodness to heartless ritual and sacrifice (6:6).
- The greatest sins of life are against true love.
- The crushing experiences of life can drive us back to the arms of God.
- God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).
- “It appears to be a universal law of this sin-stricken world that God makes perfect through suffering, that redemption is wrought through sacrifice” (Eiselen).

## JOEL,

### The Prophet of Pentecost

The prophet Joel lived in a time of great distress for the Hebrew nation. A devastating plague of locusts had ravaged their land, coupled with a scorching drought. On top of these natural disasters the nation had been invaded by neighboring states and many of her people had been sold into captivity. God raised up Joel to interpret and explain the meaning in all of these hardships, call his people to repentance and promise them a brighter future.

### About the Author

The author is identified as Joel, the son of Pethuel (1:1). The name Jo-el means “Jehovah is God.” What is revealed in his three short chapters is all we know of the author. It is probable that he was a citizen of Judah. Some have conjectured that he might have been a priest. From his message, we can determine that he was a bold, powerful, eloquent preacher of God. Also we can see that he was a poetic, prayerful man; a prophet of the first order. He has been called “The prophet of religious revival.”

### The Background of Joel’s Ministry

**Dates:** Joel does not date his message. Great diversity is reflected in the dates suggested by different commentators. Some suppose a date as early as 900, others as late as 350 B.C. Its place in the Hebrew canon shows that the ancient rabbis viewed Joel as from an early period. There being no compelling reason against it, we assume that the book was likely written in the days of King Joash, 830-810 B. C. For an excellent defense of the early date, see **The Doctrine of the Prophets** by A. F. Kirkpatrick.

Assuming the early date, Joel’s **contemporaries** would have been Elijah and Elisha in his early years and possibly Hosea in his latter days.

**Politically**, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms had recently cast off the devastating yoke of Ahab and Jezebel in the North and Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, in the South. King Joash was a mere child of seven when crowned king of Judah. The nation was guided by the high priest Jehoiada who served as regent for the young king. Jehu was seeking to stamp out the last vestiges of Jezebel's influence in the North. Spiritually, both nations were at a low ebb.

Hazael, the cruel king of Syria, was fast becoming a terror to all of his neighbors. Shalmaneser III of Assyria was launching a drive to conquer the west.

In addition to these two nations, in the last half of the ninth century B. C., Joel's people were surrounded by several other hostile neighbors. He mentions the **Phoenicians** who had sold Hebrew prisoners into slavery (3:4). (See also Amos 1:9-10). The **Philistines** (3:4) had joined with the Arabians in invading Judah and ravaging Jerusalem (II Chron. 21:16). The **Egyptians** (3:19) were perennial enemies of the Hebrews (I Kings 14:25). The **Edomites** (3:19) had revolted against Israel's rule in 848 B. C. (II Kings 8:20-23). Thus it was a time of political turmoil and uncertainty.

### **The Occasion for Writing**

A devastating plague of locusts had ravaged Palestine. Successive waves of them had stripped the land bare. Upon the heels of the locusts had come a severe drought. Famine stalked the countryside. So severe was the situation, that the daily sacrifice at the temple were discontinued for lack of provisions (1:9).

### **About the Locust**

Locusts are grasshoppers. Plagues of locusts were greatly feared by the Hebrews. Solomon earnestly prayed that God would deliver them from the locust (I Kings 8:37). A locust can eat its own weight daily. A female will lay up to 225 eggs in her life time. During a plague from 100 to 200 million locusts will be found in a square mile. Swarms have been documented that covered more than 400 square miles. In such vast numbers, they devoured every green thing, and even the bark of the trees. They have been known to attack babies. Before the age of pesticides and airplane dusting, people and nations were helpless before these hordes. For a good study on locusts, consult the article: **Locusts: Teeth of the Wind**, by R.A.M. Conley, National Geographic, Vol. 136, No. 2, Aug. 1969.

## About the Book

The book bears the name of its author. It contains both the historical account of the nation's problems and the prophet's lessons in response thereto.

The chief characteristic of Joel's **literary style** is his simple vividness. His message is written in poetic style. It is a literary gem.

There are **four purposes** seen in the author's message.

1. He wrote to interpret the natural disasters of the locusts and drought as judgments from God, intended to bring the people to repentance.
2. He sought to help his brethren see beyond the affliction to the God of discipline.
3. He foretold the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in Messiah's Day.
4. He announced the coming day of Jehovah and what would happen at that time.

**Joel's message** was fourfold:

1. The natural calamity they faced was so terrible and overwhelming, so far beyond the normal bounds, it could only be explained as a divine judgment.
2. Unless there was repentance and righteousness of life on the part of the nation, the locust and drought will be followed by even worse judgments.
3. He stressed the spiritual impact of the plague more than the economic aspect.
4. In his last chapter, he predicts the doom of their neighbors and the ultimate glory of Jehovah's cause.

## Joel and the New Testament

Joel 2:28-32 is cited by Peter as fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:1-4, 16-21). Those who hold to the various premillennial theories frequently deny that Joel's prophecy, was fulfilled at Pentecost. It has well been said that when an inspired man says "this is that which was spoken through a prophet, then that's it." (See Acts 2:16).

Paul cites the closing words of Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13, "Whosoever shall, call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In Revelation 9:7-9, John uses the locust as a symbol of a destroying army.

### **Some Miscellaneous Facts about Joel's Book**

Joel was the prophet of Pentecost, even as Isaiah was of Messiah. In his prediction of the coming of the Holy Spirit, he may have thought of Moses' wish that "that all Jehovah's people were prophets, that Jehovah would put his Spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29). Joel is quoted by Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, and some of the psalmists. This is based on the assumption of an early date. Some 27 of his 73 verses are found in other Old Testament books. Some time must have elapsed between the first and second sections, since the author records the Lord's answer to their prayers (See 2:18). Joel deals with social and moral issues less than any other prophet. The author reports one episode in his career rather than his entire ministry.

### **Important Concepts in Joel**

"The day of Jehovah (the Lord)" (1:15). Any and every major divine intervention of judgment foreshadowed the final judgment of God, hence was called a day of the Lord. Thus the term must not be understood as an exclusive designation for the final judgment.

The day of Jehovah will bring both blessings and curses. As God destroyed the locusts, so will he destroyed their political enemies. That he poured out abundant, refreshing rain upon their parched ground and delivered those who called upon him in Joel's day, is proof that he will deliver those who call upon him in the Great Day of Judgment. (Compare 2:18-19 with 2:32).

Joel uses the term "Israel" (2:27), to refer to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, not the breakaway Northern kingdom who had claimed the name for themselves.

"The sons of Javan" (3:6 KJV), is rendered "Sons of the Grecians" in the ASV. The Ionian Greeks had engaged in the business of selling Jewish captives as slaves.

The "Valley of Jehoshaphat" (3:12), likely refers to the scene of King Jehoshaphat's victory over the Amorites, Moabites, and Edomites in the wilderness of Judah below Engedi (II Chron. 20). The word Jehoshaphat means "Jehovah judges." The context shows that to be the significance of the name as used by Joel. The valley of Kidron between Jerusalem and the



Mount of Olives was not so named until the time of Jerome and Eusebius of the fourth century A. D.

### **What Literary Men Have Said about Joel's Prophecy**

“In a literary and political point of view, Joel's prophecy is one of the most beautiful productions of Hebrew literature” (F. Bleek). “As a lyrical poet, he stands among the best of the Old Testament, being graphic, terse, and exceedingly effective” (J. Bewer).

### **Key's That Unlock the Prophet's Message**

These **key verses** are seen in Joel's Book:

**1:15**, “Alas for the day! For the day of Jehovah is at hand...”

**2:25**, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten...my great army which I sent among you.”

**2:28**, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...”

The **key phrase** is “day of the Lord” (1:15, 2:1, 11, etc.).

The **key thought** is that judgment, if rightly perceived and responded to, can be a prelude to blessings.

### **A Simple Summary of Joel**

I. The Devastation, a Divine Judgment. (1:1-2:21).

II. His Call to Repentance (2:12-17).

III. Blessings Restored (2:18-27).

IV. Blessings and Judgment of the Latter Days (2:28-3:21).

### **Exposition of the Text**

“**The word of Jehovah, that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel**” (1:11). In this introductory statement, the writer identifies himself and claims a divine origin for his message.

## **The Natural Calamity, Its Meaning and the Response Demanded (1:2-2:27)**

The prophet, describes the devastation of the locusts and drought (1:2-2:11). In the first twelve verses, Joel calls upon his hearers to contemplate the meaning of what had happened to them.

**“Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (1:2-3).**

Joel appeals to the aged, whose experience was the largest and whose memory was the longest, if ever they had seen or heard of such a heavy judgment? Similar words were used to describe the locust plague in Egypt when God delivered Israel (Ex. 10:4-6). He then charges them to be diligent in passing on the record of this judgment to generations yet to come. In the ancient world, their history was passed on orally by the older people who had learned from those who had gone before them. Moses urged the people of his day to take heed, lest they forget the things which their eyes saw, and “make them known to their children” and their children’s (Deut. 4:9). So did the psalmist (Ps. 78:5-8).

**“That which the palmerworm, hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten” (1:4).** The terms **palmerworm, locust, cankerworm, and caterpillar** in 1:4 refers to locust in their different stages of growth. They pass through five stages of development: egg, larva, pupae, young fliers and mature flies. Driver renders the words: shearer, swarmer, lapper, and finisher.

Haupt translates the passage thusly:

**“What the old locust left,  
the newly hatched hopper ate;  
what the hopper left,  
the (pupae) crawler ate,  
what the crawler left,  
the (mature) fliers ate.”**

Three views have been offered regarding the locust.

1. **Allegorical.** This view sees them as figurative of hostile nations that invaded Israel.
2. **Apocalyptic.** This sees them symbolizing the awful judgments of the end time.
3. **Natural or Historical.** This understands the prophet to be recording an actual locust plague in the history of Israel. To this view this author subscribes.

The locusts had stripped their land and left them helpless and starving in their wake. Today America and other prosperous nations would rush emergency food supplies to a nation in such circumstances. Great airplanes would fly in tons of food. In those distant times, a nation was left to struggle alone in their crisis.

**“Awake, ye drunkards, and weep: and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth” (1:5).** While drunkenness is condemned in other places (See Is. 5:11; 28:13), in this passage Joel is calling them to soberness that they might fully realize the extent of their ruin. The locust had not only eaten the crops in the fields, they had also destroyed the vineyards and orchards (1: 7). Those who abused wine and those who drank fresh grape juice would be deprived because of the locusts. Wine in its various forms was the principal beverage among the Hebrews.

**“For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw-teeth of a lioness. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white” (1:6-7).**

The **“nation,”** that had invaded them was the locusts. Because of their vast numbers, 100-200 million per square mile, and because of their destructive power, he described them as an invading army. In that day, they were invincible. See the introductory section for more information on locusts.

Shifting metaphors, Joel likens the locusts to lions. Though a single locust is tiny and when alone no threat at all, in a great swarm such as the people faced, the mouths of the locusts were deadly and destructive as a lion. Remember that his words are figurative. Locusts have no teeth such as lions have.

Having first cleaned the greenery of the land, the hungry insects ate the tender branches and stripped the bark off the vines and trees leaving the white inner flesh exposed. Thus barked, a tree or vine would soon dry up and die. We can

imagine seeing the land barren or like a wilderness with the whiten poles of its dead trees standing as stark grave markers.

He says to the priests: **“Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the Lord; the priests, Jehovah’s ministers, mourn”** (1:8-9). To lament means to mourn bitterly. “Like” tells us the comparison is a simile. “Sackcloth” was the coarse cloth worn in times of great sorrow, such as death of a family member. They should mourn like a virgin for the husband of her youth. In those days a young woman was considered the wife of a man from the time of her betrothal (Deut. 22:22-29). Yet during the engagement period she lived with her relatives and did not have direct contact with her husband to be. Her sorrow would be especially great if he died before they were privileged to share their lives together. So should the priests of Jehovah’s temple mourn, because the famine was so severe that no meal offerings or drink offerings could be offered at God’s house.

The meal or meat offering consisted of flour, oil and frankincense (Lev. 2:1-3). A portion was burned and the rest went to the priests. The drink offering was of wine (Lev. 23:13). Without the flour, oil, and wine the priests could not offer the daily sacrifice of the temple (Ex. 29:38-42). God had promised to meet with Aaron’s sons at the door of the tent of meeting each day when they offered the daily meal and drink offering.

He then calls upon the husbandmen and vine dressers to consider their plight: **“The field is laid waste, the land mourneth; for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be confounded, O ye husbandmen, wail, O ye vine dressers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is withered, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men”** (1:10-12).

Joel plays upon the sound of the words. In the original, verse 10a would be expressed as follows, “the field fails,” “the ground grieves” (J. J. Given).

Having introduced the fact that the meat and drink offerings were cut off, he proceeds to note specifically that the grain, wine, and oil (ingredients of those offerings) are destroyed.

**“Husbandmen”** are tillers of the soil or farmers. They mourn because their entire crop is lost. Not only will it mean economic loss, but hunger as well.

The **“pomegranate tree”** is indigenous to Palestine. It grows to a height of 20 feet and has spreading branches with beautiful red blossoms. Its fruit has an orange-brown color and pleasing to the taste.

The **“palm tree”** refers to the date palm which was important for its fruit production. It grows up to 100 ft. in height.

The **“apple tree”** is likely a generic term referring to an aromatic fruit and might include, either the apple, apricot, or quince (Laetsch). The Arabs include oranges, lemons, and peaches in the same genre (Henderson).

**“The trees of the field”** refers to other than fruit bearing trees. None had escaped the teeth of the locusts.

**“ Joy is withered away,”** because of their devastating losses. No food, no provisions for worship, no harvest celebrations, only the cruel spectra of famine stalking their land.

He next issues a charge to the priests: **“Gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament, ye priests; wail, ye ministers of the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering are withholden from the house of your God”** (1:13). He uses a parallelism of three lines to emphasize his point. Three times he refers to the sons of Aaron in slightly different terms: **“Ye priests,” “ye ministers of the altar,” “ye ministers of my God.”** His point is that they, the spiritual leaders of the nation, must lead the way in repentance and mourning. For before restoration of blessings and renewal can come, there must be repentance and reformation in the hearts and lives of the people.

He continues his charge to the priests, saying, **“Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the old men and all the inhabitants of the land unto the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto Jehovah”** (1:14). The drastic situation demanded a drastic response. He calls for a national day of fasting and mourning. King Jehoshaphat called for such a fast when the nation was threatened by an invasion of the Moabites, Amorites, and Edomites (II Chron. 20:3). (See also Judges 20:26-27 and Jeremiah 36:9). There was to be a special assembly at the temple of God where they could petition the Lord for mercy.

**“The old men”** likely refers to the elders of the people who would lead the way in their appeal to God. Considering verses 13-14, we can determine the essential ingredients of such a solemn occasion; a gathering for divine

worship, garments of mourning; abstinence from food, confession of sin and petitions for mercy and assistance.

The words of mourning expressed by the prophet (1:15-20), were an example of the words and sentiments the people should lift up unto God.

**“Alas for the day! For the day of Jehovah is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty shall it come”** (1:15). **“Alas”** is a term expressing unhappiness or misery. **“The day of Jehovah”** in this text should not be understood as the day of final judgment. It was a term used for any intervention of divine judgment upon a people. All such days do foreshadow that **last great day of judgment** when the heavens and earth shall be destroyed (II Pet. 3:10, 12). **“The day of God”** which they mourned was the one of locust plague and drought. The prophet stresses, that they should see the plague, not just as an unfortunate event in nature, but as **“destruction from the Almighty.”**

**“Is not the food cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?”** (1:16). In these words he describes the awful consequences of the locust. The fruit of their trees and crops in the fields was devoured before their eyes. This was no hyperbole. Thompson, in his volume, **The Land and the Book**, writes, **“I saw under my own eyes not only a large vineyard loaded with young grapes, but whole fields of corn disappear as if by magic; the crops of the husbandman vanish like smoke”** (p. 418).

By adding the ellipsis we can better understand the second point he makes. **“Joy and gladness (are cut off) from the house of our God.”** Because, the crops were destroyed, no grain for meal offerings and no wine for drink offerings would be brought to the temple. No rejoicing or celebration of worship and holy days would be experienced under those circumstances. Moses had taught them that when they brought their gifts to God’s house **“there ye shall eat before Jehovah.....and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto....”** (Deut. 12:7). The word **“meat”** in the KJV is confusing, the ASV translators correctly render it **“food.”**

Verses 17-20 of chapter one describe the result of the drought that had come along with the locusts. **“The seeds rot under their clods; the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down for the grain is withered”** (1:17). The locusts devoured the standing crop. When they replanted, the seed did not germinate because of drought. That which did sprout withered. Store houses, granaries were neglected because there were no crops to store.

**“How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Jehovah,**

to thee do I cry; for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field, yea, the beasts of the field pant unto thee; for the water brooks are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness” (1:18-20). He describes the domesticated animals as bewildered in their futile search for food, lowing and bleating in their hunger. The animals, although innocent of any crime, still suffered with the sinners. Nor could the creatures understand why such was happening. The prophet felt sympathy for the poor creatures. He knew God’s concern for both men and beast. ( See Psalm 36:5-10).

“**The fire**” that devoured the pastures and “**the flame**” that burned the trees are metaphors to describe the searing heat of the drought which is as destructive to the vegetation as would be a fire. It might also refer to literal fire for when the land is tender dry from drought, fires easily break out and ravage the land. Also the ancients set fires before the oncoming locust hoping to destroy them or at least to turn them away from their crops.

### **The Locusts Pictured as Jehovah’s Army (2:1-11).**

Borrowing the metaphor of war, Joel calls for the watchmen to sound the trumpet of alarm to awaken the people to the imminent danger of invasion. “**Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is nigh at hand**” (2:1). He interprets the disaster as a “**day of Jehovah**” that has come upon them because of their sin. All the inhabitants are urged to “**tremble**” before their offended God that they may find mercy. (Compare Phil. 2:12). That he speaks of Zion is an indication that the prophet was a man of the Southern Kingdom.

The day of Jehovah he proceeds to describe. It is “**a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the dawn spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be anymore after them, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land as the garden of Eden before them and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and none hath escaped them**” (2:2-3).

With two dramatic pictures, he describes the day of the Lord that had overtaken them. First the immense swarm of locusts is like a huge black cloud that hides the sun. When in flight, a large swarm of these creatures is frequently said to darken the sun. The word rendered “dawn” is **shachar** which the RSV correctly renders “like **blackness** there is spread upon the mountains...” That

which causes the darkness, the clouds, the blackness is the locust which he calls **“a great people and a strong (people).”** Similar language is used by Moses to describe the plague of locusts that struck Egypt. **“For they covered the face of the whole earth so that the land was darkened...”** (Ex. 10:15).

The second comparison of the devastation of the locusts is that of a fire. Before they come, the land was a lush and green as the Garden of Eden. After they left it looked like a burnt, desolate wilderness. The expression **“Garden of Eden”** may be translated **“Garden of Delight”** (F. C. Cook). The student should consult E. B. Pusey’s **Commentary on the Minor Prophets** for a lengthy and detailed historical description of locust plagues in the Middle East. Joel’s words are not the least exaggerated. The severity of the locust infestations is expressed in the phrase **“there hath not ever been the like, neither shall be any more after them.”**

Joel adds a third description of the locusts. He likens them to an army of attacking soldiers. **“The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen so do they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as strong people set in battle array”** (2:4-5). Like other poets, Joel uses bold and expressive metaphors to describe the invading horde. In their swift advance they remind him of a huge calvary assault. They mow down the vegetation just as military chariots mowed down opposing soldiers. To appreciate this figure, you must understand that the wheels of their war chariots were fitted with heavy cutting blades that rotated as the wheels turned. Drawn by powerful horses, they would shear the legs of any foot soldier they encountered. The noise generated by the locusts devouring the plants he likens to the crackling of vegetation being consumed by fire. As a whole they were like a huge army advancing across the earth.

**“At their presence the people are in anguish; all faces are waxed pale”** (2:6). In this verse, he paints a vivid picture of the victims of the invading locusts. It was what you would see if the invasion was an army of cruel men. People saw their livelihood destroyed before their eyes. Their crops were destroyed, but they could be replanted. But locusts also ate the bark off of trees and vines. Thus stripped, the plants died. It would take several years to bring new plants to maturity. The poor farmers were terrified, the blood drained from their faces as they watched the destruction. Remember in those days there were no pesticides. There were no airplanes to dust their crops and save them. To fight them off was impossible. They were helpless before the devouring army.



**“They run like a mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one on his ways, and they break not their ranks. Neither doth one thrust another; and they burst through the weapons, and break not off their course. They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows like a thief” (2:7-9).** Still using metaphors of an invading army, he depicts them as invincible. Nothing can deter them. Walls cannot stop the locusts. Just as soldiers scale the walls of a fortress city, so the locust go over the walls of houses or gardens, to reach the food they seek. Like victorious soldiers set on looting their victims, the locusts, seeking anything edible, swarmed through the open or latticed windows into the very houses of the people.

**“The earth quaketh before them; the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining” (2:10).** The earth quaking, is not to be taken literally. It describes the impact of the locust plague on society. With their means of livelihood destroyed, families were penniless. Taxes could not be paid. Business had no paying customers. The entire social structure, from the peasant to the rulers, was brought to its knees. Neither did the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, stars, literally tremble. The following line tells us what he saw in the heavens. The heavens were darkened when the swarms of locust took flight in search of more food. Imagine swarms numbering 100-200 million per square acre taking flight.

There might be a secondary meaning to his mention of sun, moon and stars being darkened. The Hebrew prophets frequently used this imagery to describe the collapse and overthrow of government. (See Isaiah 13:10; 34:40; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:28-32; Revelation 6:12-17). The key to interpreting these descriptions is found in Genesis 37:9-10. There Joseph dreamed that the sun, moon and eleven stars made obeisance to him. His father understood, the sun to refer to himself, the ruler of the family clan, the moon to Joseph’s mother and the stars to his brothers. Joseph was one of the youngest of the brothers, how could this be? Where this imagery is used, the prophet is saying that kings, queens, and secondary rulers would all be overthrown and lose their power.

**“And Jehovah uttereth his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?” (2:11).** Just as armies of nations have a general who sets their objective, plans their strategy and orders their advance, Joel sees his God as the one directing the great army of locusts. God has a purpose in allowing this judgment on his people. He has an objective and no one can keep Him from attaining it. He is invincible. Ezekiel tells us that among the weapons in God’s arsenal are “the sword, and the famine, and

the evil beasts, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast” (Ezek. 15:21). The Hebrews were experiencing the pain of his punishment by the locust plague. Their only hope was that God would have mercy and call off his invading army. **“The day of Jehovah”** and similar expressions are found throughout God’s Word. The most common usage in the Old Testament is a judgement in time against one or more nations, after which events will move onward. In the New Testament, the meaning most often speaks of the great and final day of the Lord that will bring to an end our material world (II Pet. 3:7-13), and leave us to stand before Christ our Judge (II Cor. 10). We must always let the context determine which of these meanings apply in a particular text. In every case the “day of the Lord” is **“great and very terrible”** and no man can escape its consequences.

### **His Call to Repentance (2:12-17).**

**“Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repenteth him of the evil”** (2:12-13). The righteous God who judges and punishes the wicked is also the God of mercy and forgiveness. Then as now, “God is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). He makes it clear that it is not enough to simply say, “I am sorry.” No, He demands genuine repentance. He wants more than an outward token such as rending or tearing one’s garment. He wants a heart broken with shame and sorrow for ones sins and a resolution to change ones life. David says, “Jehovah is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18). True repentance affects personal sin in the same way that an antibiotic affects an infection. Repentance cannot take away the guilt of sin, but it creates a situation where God can cleanse and forgive the sinner. The church of our age needs to hear lessons on “rend your heart and not your garments.”

Although God’s mercy is magnified in Christ (Tit. 2:11), passages like this reminded the Hebrews that Jehovah was **“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness”** (2:13). Those who preach need to remember when warning sinners of God’s judgment to temper it with his marvelous grace.

It has always intrigued man that God could **“repent”** of anything. After all, Samuel told Saul that “the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent” (I Sam. 15:29). Enemies of God are quick to

pounce on words like Joel's, thinking to prove a contradiction in the Sacred Word. It is obvious to the unprejudiced student that the word "repentance" has two meanings. For man to receive forgiveness of sins there must be godly sorrow that leads him to change his conduct from disobedience to obedience toward God (II Cor. 7:10). Since God does not sin, he cannot repent in this sense of the word. But to repent also means to change ones mind. That is the meaning of all the passages cited that say that God repented of his intention to punish wicked men. (See Exodus 32:14; Jeremiah 18:8, etc.). In this sense, rather than suggesting some weakness or failure in God, it reflects his love, mercy and justice for men who are truly sorry for their sins. "The evil" God repents of in 2:13, is the judgements that their sins had incurred. If they would repent, he would remove his hand of judgement.

**"Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal-offering and a drink-offering unto Jehovah your God" (2:14).** If they would do their part and truly repent, they could count on their merciful God to lift his judgments and restore to them their prosperity. Their crops would flourish and there would soon be sufficient harvest that they could bring to the temple their meal-offering and drink-offering which came from the first fruits of harvest (Lev. 2:14-16).

**"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the assembly, assemble the old men, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber, and the bride out of her closet" (2:15-16).** God instructs the priests to call for a solemn assembly at the temple in Jerusalem. The trumpets were used to summon the people for the service were made of silver (Num. 10:1-2). Earlier they had been used for removal of the camp while they were in the wilderness. Now they were used for calling sacred meetings of the people.

Every one in the nation was called to stand before God. Normally the very young, those who were too old to make the journey and the newly wed were excused from such pilgrimages to Jerusalem. But now, the extremities of their sin and punishment made it necessary for all to stand before God with penitent hearts and seek his mercy.

**"Let the priests, the ministers of Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar and let them say, Spare thy people O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?" (2:17).** This was the purpose of the solemn assembly of 2:15. It was a day of national mourning. The nation was so weakened by the devastating locust plague, that

they were in imminent danger of being overrun by their stronger enemies. They had neither strength nor resources to defend themselves. Their only hope for deliverance was their God. Among the ancient peoples, a nation and its God were inextricably united. Thus if the Hebrews failed, their heathen neighbors would conclude that their God had proven incapable of saving them. They would taunt the Hebrews asking, Where is your God?

**“Then was Jehovah jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. And Jehovah answered and said unto his people, Behold I will send you grain, and new wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations;” (2:19).** This verse suggests to us that the people did truly repent, rending their hearts and not just their garments. They engaged in the prescribed national day of mourning. God heard and accepted their cries for forgiveness and restoration and granted the blessing. Through his spokesman, Joel, he promised to send them crops that would relieve their suffering. The reproach of which they had spoken would be lifted.

**“But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive it into a land barren and desolate, its forepart into the eastern sea; and its hinder part into the western sea; and its stench shall come up and its ill savor shall come up, because it hath done great things” (2:20).** “The northern army” refers to the invading locust horde. Most of the military invasions of Israel had come from the North. With the Mediterranean on the West, and a vast desert to the East, most of their attackers had come from the north. He likens the locusts to those armies. When locusts invade a region their movement is unpredictable. For reasons unknown to us they might take flight and travel for miles before landing again. God promises to “drive” the locusts, some into the desert, some into the “western sea, i.e., the Mediterranean, and some to the “eastern sea,” i.e., the Dead Sea, where they would perish. The vast numbers of the decaying locusts would foul the air.

**“Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice; for Jehovah hath done great things. Be not afraid ye beasts of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth its fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength” (2:21-22).** In addressing the “land” and promising renewal after the locust invasion, the author uses a metonymy making the land stand for the inhabitants thereof. In addressing the beasts of the field and pastures, he uses a figure called an “apostrophe” whereby one addresses inanimate objects. Notice that Joel attributes the sending of the locusts, their removal and the return of prosperity to Jehovah. People educated in secular schools tend to think of the world’s events in a mechanical sense. Christians should always see God’s

hand of providence in all that is transpiring. Because they had repented and turned back to God, he would reward them with abundant crops.

**“Be glad then, ye children of Zion and rejoice in Jehovah your God; for he giveth you the former rain in just measure, and he causeth to come down for you the latter rain, in the first month”** (2:23). Mt. Zion is the elevation in Jerusalem whereon the temple stood. Children of Zion were God’s faithful worshippers. They could rejoice because their God not only drove the locusts away, but He caused the drought to cease by sending their normal seasonal rains. In Palestine they have two rainy seasons per year. Early or former rains are those of the autumn months (mid-October to mid-December). With sufficient rain, the newly planted seed would sprout and begin its development. With the latter rains, which came in March and April, the crops would mature, producing a good yield. Notice that he promises God would send the rain **“in just measure,”** i.e, just the right amount; not torrents that would destroy the crops. In the law, God promised them that he would reward their faithfulness with **“rains in their seasons”** (Lev. 26:3-4). The **“first month”** is the month Nisan, which falls in the same period as our March and April.

**“And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be put to shame. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Jehovah your God, and there is none else; and my people shall never be put to shame”** (2:24-27). **“The floors”** full of wheat refers to their threshing floors. The **“vats”** their vats for crushing grapes and olives from which they derived their prized olive oil.

The NIV greatly improves the rendering of vs. 25. **“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locusts, the other locusts, and the locust swarm”**

Thus He reminds them that the same God who sent the plague would send them prosperity and abundance. The purpose of all of this is seen in vs. 26 **“And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel.”** God was and is immanent with his people. The church is his kingdom and the Holy Spirit dwells therein (I Cor. 3:16). So long as they were faithful and obedient to God they would never be ashamed. Blessings were conditioned on faithfulness. Such is still true today (I Cor. 4:2; Rev. 2:10).

## II. THINGS YET TO COME (2:28-3:21).

**“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit”** (2:28-29). In the Hebrew text, 2:28 is the beginning of the third chapter. With these words, the prophet looks far into the future to that day when God’s Holy Spirit will be poured out upon **all nations**. These words would seem strange to the average Hebrew who, from his earliest years, was taught that Jehovah’s blessings were reserved for them alone. The rabbis could say it meant all Hebrews of every age and social group, but it seemed never to dawn on them that Joel foresaw a day when Gentiles would receive that great gift. The fulfillment was in two steps. For the Hebrews it came to pass on the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. Of this we can be confident because Peter said, “this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel.” It has well been said that “when an inspired teacher says “this is that,” then, “that’s that!” There can be no further arguing of the point. We know that God’s Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, as Peter was declaring unto them the gospel of Christ (Acts 10:44-45). When Peter was called by the other Apostles to explain his actions with the Gentiles he said, “If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17).

Prophecies and visions stand as a synecdoche for all the miraculous gifts that would accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit. In addition to these, Paul lists many others in I Corinthians 12:4-11. In reading in the book of Acts, the record of the early church, we see these several miraculous gifts displayed.

From the fulfillment in Acts 2, we see two categories of receiving the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). That empowered them to be Christ’s witnesses to sinners of all nations (Acts 1:8). It enabled them to speak in foreign languages they had not learned by study (Acts 2:4-8). They received supernatural guidance in speaking “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). They were enabled to perform remarkable miracles to confirm that God was indeed working in and through them (Mark 16:16-20).

The people who heard and believed the Apostles’ message, repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus received remission of sins and the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). This gift of the Spirit endowed them with many rich blessings but it did not empower them to speak in tongues and work miracles.

This is clearly noted in Acts 8. Philip the evangelist taught and baptized believers in Samaria (Acts 8:12). This would have brought them the same gifts as Peter promised on Pentecost. Those believers who repented and were baptized...unto (for KJV) the remission of their sins would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Philip evidently could not bestow on them any supernatural gifts. The Apostles, Peter and John, went to Samaria and laid their hands on them and they “received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17). Those receiving that special blessing were given supernatural powers that could be seen (Acts 8:18).

The pouring out of the Spirit was not to be limited to prophets or priests, but all saved people were to receive the blessing. Thus he mentions, men and women, young and old and servants as well as their masters. The recipients would be those who were obedient children of God (Acts 5:32).

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit was to be accompanied by many spectacular signs. Joel speaks of dreams, visions and prophecy. Looking again at Acts chapter two, we see that fulfilled at the instant the Spirit came upon the twelve Apostles (Compare Acts 1:26 with 2:1). This makes it clear that only the Apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. There was the sound of a rushing, mighty wind such as a tornado produces. There were what appeared to be tongues of fire upon the heads of each of them (Acts 2:3). They spoke in languages they had not previously known.

Joel continues, **“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke”** (2:30). Taken with vs. 31, this could be figurative language describing the desolation of war: great bloodshed and the smoke of burning cities. Some take the words in a literal sense understanding them to refer to things transpiring at the temple at the time of the Spirit’s coming. In his sermon on that occasion, Peter tells us it was “the third hour of the day (Acts 2:15). That would be 9:00 a.m., the time when the priests would be offering the morning sacrifice. With the slain sacrificial animals there would be blood. On the great altar, the fire would be kindled to consume the offering and the smoke would be wafting upwards to heaven. While either of these are reasonable explanations of the text, this author prefers the latter meaning.

**“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Jehovah cometh”** (2:30-31). Many teachers have wearied themselves trying to explain how, on that day, the sun and moon were literally changed. The fact is, the prophet clothes his prediction with symbolic language commonly used among the Hebrews. Isaiah described the

coming overthrow of Babylon with similar language (13:9-10) and the same of Edom (Is. 34:4). Jeremiah used it of Judah (4:23-25). Ezekiel used similar imagery to describe the punishment of Egypt (32:1-8). Amos described the coming judgement on the Northern Kingdom in similar language (Amos. 8:1-9). Jesus described the destruction of Jerusalem with the same illustration (Matt. 24:29). John used the same in predicting the destruction of Rome (Rev. 6:12-13). The meaning is found in Genesis 37:9. Joseph dreamed the sun, moon and eleven stars made obeisance to him. His father interpreted it to mean that his father, mother and brethren would bow down to him. (37:10). Thus the heavenly lights being darkened predicted a violent overthrow of government. The sun represented the highest authority, the moon the second tier of dignitaries and the stars, lesser authorities. The establishment of Christ's church was the beginning of the end of the Jewish state. The new kingdom of heaven would replace the earthly kingdom of Israel. That occurred in 70 A. D. when the legions of Rome defeated the Jewish rebels, burned the Holy City and temple and scattered the surviving Jews throughout the world. **"The great and terrible day of Jehovah,"** in this context, almost certainly refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the dissolution of the Jewish state. Without question, each day of the Lord that occurs in human history foreshadows the uniquely great and terrible day when God will destroy the material world by fire (II Pet. 3:10), and all who have lived upon the earth will stand before Christ and receive the things done in their lives (II Cor. 5:10).

**"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered; for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as Jehovah hath said, and among the remnant those whom Jehovah doth call"** (2:32). As the prophet contemplated the fiery destruction of Jerusalem, in the great day of Jehovah, he saw hope amidst the destruction. **"Whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered"** and some who dwelt in Jerusalem would escape. In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus warned his disciples of the coming invasion of the Roman armies. He told them, "When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation... standing in the holy place...then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains..." (Matt. 24:15-16). We know that when the Romans approached the city, the Christians, one and all, abandoned the city and fled to Pella east of the Jordan River. There they were safe while Jerusalem was being sieged and finally taken and burned. Eusebius, the father of church history, records their escape to safety.

When Peter cited this passage, in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he found a spiritual application in Joel's promise and offered salvation from sin to all who called upon the name of the Lord. He told those who asked, what



must they do? to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins and at that point they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28). He went on to say, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). Three thousand souls claimed the promise.

**“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will execute judgment upon them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations: and they have parted my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink” (3:1-3).** This section is introduced with the word “For” which ties it to the preceding teaching, i.e., the day when God would pour forth His Spirit. In 2:29-32, Joel had predicted a great and terrible day of judgement on the disobedient Hebrews. In this section he speaks of coming days when God would bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. He also proceeds to predict devastating judgements upon the various nations who had done harm to God’s people. In doing this we see a blending of literal, historical events that were forthcoming and great spiritual developments that would be fulfilled in Christ and his church, the kingdom of heaven.

At the time of Joel’s writing, the citizens of the Southern Kingdom of Judah occupied their homeland. From 606-586 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian troops would overrun them and deport them to Babylon as prisoners of war. There they would languish for 70 years. When Babylon was defeated by the Persians, the surviving remnant was allowed to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of Ezra and Zerubbabel the first wave of settlers returned to Judea. Others eventually followed and in time most of the land was repopulated by Hebrews. While this restoration was yet future when Joel wrote, it is more likely that he spoke of the remnant of the Hebrews being gathered into Messiah’s spiritual kingdom, the church. Remember he is writing of things in those days and times of the Spirit’s coming (3:1). Amos expresses a similar thought of restoration and it is clearly in Messiah’s reign. “And I will bring back the captivity of my people, Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them” (Amos 9:14). The Apostle James cites the prediction of Amos 9:11-15 as pertaining to the church, the new spiritual Israel (Acts 15:14-18). Isaiah, says, “...in that day, that the Lord will set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people that shall remain...” (Is.11:11).

The church is the spiritual Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Its citizens are God's firstborn children (Heb. 12:22-23). Today, every one, who in faith, is baptized into Christ is a child of God. Belonging to Christ, we are "Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise." God no longer makes a distinction between Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:26-29). All of those who have faith such as Abraham had are his spiritual descendants. The Church of Christ is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:17). Today God is gathering Abraham's children into Christ's church whether they be Jew or Greek. It is spiritual Israel,

As God punished the disobedient Hebrews, he now serves notice that those Gentile nations that for generations had harassed and ravaged His people Israel will all receive the judgment due them for their wickedness. When reading of God's judgments, **we must always remember that nations are judged in time for the evils they have done while individuals will be judged in eternity** (Acts 17:31; II Cor. 5:10).

In this section he tells us:

1. What would happen: Judgement upon Gentile nations for their crimes against God's people (3:2).
2. Where it would happen: in the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2). The word Jehoshaphat means "Jehovah judges." It is this meaning of the word the prophet wishes to emphasize. Engagements between warring armies in those days were usually fought in valleys. We should understand that Jehovah is going to judge those heathen nations by making war upon them here on the earth.
3. When it would happen: "In those days...when (God) shall bring back the captivity of Judah..." (3:1).
4. Why they were to be judged: They had scattered God's people among the nations and sold them as slaves. They had robbed His temple (3:2-5).
5. What their judgement would consist of: Other nations would wage successful war against the enemies of God and the Hebrews. They would suffer the same kind of horror and sorrow they had inflicted upon the Hebrews (3:9-12). Their nations would be destroyed and consigned to the ash heap of history.

Among those cited for judgment are Tyre and Sidon of Phoenicia and the Philistines. These stand by synecdoche for all of their pagan enemies.

Several charges are leveled against the offending nations:

1. They had **“scattered among the nations”** God’s heritage, i.e., his people (3:2).
2. As conquerors, they had **“parted (God’s) land”** among themselves (3:2b).
3. They had **“cast lots for my people”** (3:3a). This was done as they took for themselves slaves from among the defeated Hebrews.
4. They sold Jewish captives to slave traders who took them far from their homes.
5. They had given **“a boy for a harlot.”** There were so many captives that the slave market was glutted. A young boy was worth no more than a night with a harlot.
6. They exchanged a young Jewish girl for a bottle of wine (3:3). These nations had no respect for human life. To them their captives were no more than merchandise to be traded. Even innocent children were abused. This attitude is still with us among many of those individuals and nations that do not honor Jehovah: Nazi Germany, Tojo’s Japan, Russia, China and other Communist nations greatly abused their victims. In our nation it is manifest in those who promote abortion of innocent babies and those who abuse women and children.
7. They had robbed God’s temple of its treasure (3:5).

**“Yea, and what are ye to me, O Tyre, and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Will ye render me a recompense? And if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense upon your own head”** (3:4). When the prophet turns and speaks to an audience not present (Tyre, Sidon and Philistia), it is called an “apostrophe.” The word means to turn away from the real audience before you and address an imaginary one. The NIV gives a clearer rendering of vs. 4. “Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.” To understand this, imagine these nations standing before the great Judge of the universe, trying to justify the evil things they had done to God’s people. The Judge warns them if you try this ruse, He will add that to the punishment they are due! God then tells them the punishment they can expect to receive.

**“Forasmuch as ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly precious things, and have sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem unto the sons of the Grecians, that ye may remove them far from their border; behold, I will stir them up out**

**of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompense upon your own head; and I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the men of Sheba, to a nation far off: for Jehovah hath spoken it” (3:5-8).** This reminds us that nations as well as individuals reap what they have sown (Gal. 6:7). As to when this would happen, we must remember that all of chapter three has to do with events that would come after God poured forth his Spirit on all flesh (2:28 & 3:1). Christians living under the law of Christ are forbidden to take revenge on their enemies (Rom. 12:17-21). Such judgements we are to leave to God’s hands. While there is no evidence that the Jews ever exercised such power over their hostile neighbors, we do know that in time, God utterly destroyed all of those nations. Their enemies had sold the Hebrew captives to the Grecians located to their north and west. God would punish them by selling them into the hands of people in Sheba, far to their south. When he says, **“for Jehovah hath spoken it,”** he wants his readers to know that these are not just the words of Joel the prophet, but of almighty God!

**“Proclaim ye this among the nations: prepare war; stir up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong” (3:9-10).** This is a challenge issued by our God to the heathen nations. He taunts them, to make every effort to defend themselves, let them fight with all their combined might. They should know that they will be defeated and destroyed by Jehovah, our king and their Judge. Among the ancient nations iron was in short supply. In peacetime they turned their swords in plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks (Is. 2:4). When war approached, they melted down their plow blades and pruning knives and used the metal to make swords and spear heads.

**“Haste ye, and come, all ye nations round about, and gather yourselves together: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Jehovah” (3:11).** The last phrase in this verse is the prophet’s prayer that God would send his angelic army to deal with these heathen hordes.

**“Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there will I sit to judge all the nations round about. Put ye in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe; come, tread ye; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great” (3:12-13).** The language of Joel 3:9-17 reminds us of John’s description of Christ’s conquest over the nations of earth. He is depicted as treading “the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God” (Rev. 19:15). In Revelation 14:15 we see God’s Son reaping the harvest of sin in the earth. As the juice of the crushed

grapes gushed from the vats, so would the life blood of all those who array themselves against Jehovah and his people.

Think of the vanity and foolishness of any man or nation that thinks they can successfully challenge the great Jehovah. In God's arsenal are weapons like the locusts, and other insect plagues, blight and disease of every kind; volcanoes and earth quakes; destructive winds, flooding rains, lightning bolts, ice and hail (Ps. 148:8). In addition to these He has at his disposal legions of angels capable of protecting His people and inflicting great destruction on their enemies (Is. 37:36). Asaph put it plainly, "Thou, even thou, art to be feared; And who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" (Ps. 76:7).

**"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of Jehovah is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining"** (3:14-15). Joel tells us what he sees in his vision, a vast army of wicked men arrayed against the Lord and his saints. "The valley of decision" is the same as the valley of Jehoshaphat (Jehovah judges) mentioned in 3:2.

The prophet once again uses the imagery of the sun, moon and stars being darkened (as in 2:31). The meaning is the same. Great nations that had resisted our God would be overthrown. Kings, princes and governors would be cast down. Like snuffed candles, their lights would go out before our triumphant Lord.

**"And Jehovah will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but Jehovah will be a refuge unto his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel"** (3:16). Zion was the location of Jehovah's temple, in which was the Holy of Holies where his **shekinah** was seen as a glowing light. In our Christian age, the church is the new, spiritual mount Zion (Heb. 12:22-23). Likening God powerful voice to the roar of a lion is a favorite of the prophets. (See Hosea 11:10; Amos 1:2; 3:8; Jer. 25:30). The lion roars when he springs upon his prey. So when our Lord roars, the wicked will be struck down. Joel hastens to assure God's faithful servants that they will have nothing to fear from God's destructive judgments. He will be their refuge and stronghold as He pursues their enemies. The shaking of the earth at God's voice is reminiscent of his appearance on mount Sinai. "And mount Sinai, the whole of it, smoked, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire...and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him..." (Ex. 19:18-19). All of this illustrates his majesty and power.

**“So shall ye know that I am Jehovah your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more”** (3:17). Each time God delivers his people from danger, they should be reminded that he is Jehovah, their protector. He avenged himself on His enemies in ancient times and will do the same today. The great day of the Lord will be when Christ returns as heaven’s designated judge (II Pet. 3:10; Acts. 17:31). The strangers who would no more trouble Jerusalem were the Gentile nations that had molested the Hebrews in days past. Today it would describe those unbelievers who are every trying to find a place of influence and power in Christ’s church.

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim”** (3:18). **“In that day”** is in Messiah’s day, when the Spirit has been poured out upon all nations. The blessings of that age are set forth in profuse poetic imagery, easily understood by an agricultural people. **“The mountains shall drop down sweet wine”** refers to the abundant crops of grapes that were grown on the terraced hillsides. This is a metonymy of the subject. **“The hills shall flow with milk”** refers to the cattle and goats that graze up the hills and give abundant milk. **“All the brooks of Judah shall flow with waters”** was encouraging to a people, much of whose land was semi-arid. Many of their streams were wet-weather streams and often dry. In their glorious future their blessings would flow continually. In Christ, Paul says, we **“are made full”** (Col. 2:10).

**“A fountain shall come forth from the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim.”** He speaks not of a literal fountain of water, but a perpetual stream of blessings. Ezekiel saw such a life-giving fountain (Ezek. 47:1-12). Zechariah also saw a similar fountain. **“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness”** (Zech. 13:1). Jesus perhaps had this in mind when he said, **“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive...”** (John 7:37-38). **“The valley of Shittim”** means **“the valley of acacias.”** The acacia tree is a hardwood tree found in the land from Judea to Egypt. The furniture of the tabernacle was constructed of acacia wood. The valley of Shittim was an oasis where the Hebrews camped as they made their way to the promised land. It was there that the people’s hearts were turned to the degenerate Moabite worship of Baalpeor. Twenty-four thousand perished because of their great sin (Num. 25:1). In Joel’s vision, he sees, not judgment, but blessings flowing into the valley of Shittim from

the fountain coming forth from Jehovah's house. In heaven, John saw a river of water of life flowing from the throne of God, blessing all nations (Rev. 22:1-2).

**“Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the children of Judah, because they had shed innocent blood in their land”** (3:19). Both Egypt and Edom were long-time enemies of God's people. Joel saw in the future that God's judgments would be upon them along with all others who had set themselves against Jehovah and his people. Both of these nations were overrun and swallowed up by other nations. Today they are occupied by people of other origins. Remember that nations are judged in time while individuals will be judged in eternity.

**“But Judah shall abide for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. And I will cleanse their blood, that I have not cleansed: for Jehovah dwelleth in Zion”** (3:20-21). We are again reminded that Joel is speaking of events that would follow the pouring out of God's Spirit. These lines seem to point to that day when God's saved people will dwell with Him in New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-8). The enemies of God will have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone!

### LESSONS TO REMEMBER

- God executes his judgements by his agents in the natural world, such as locust, and thus displays his justice and omnipotence as moral governor of the world.
- How can sinful man hope to resist God when He can use the smallest creatures to accomplish His will?
- Disasters help to turn us to the Lord and make us receptive to his word.
- A sensation of their dependence on God makes for a true religious revival among people.
- God wants contrite hearts, not just outward signs of mourning such as torn garments. A broken heart is the only sound heart in God's sight.
- Genuine repentance gives God a chance to send blessings instead of calamities.
- The day of the Lord's judgment is inevitable for all. None can evade it.
- The only way to escape destruction is through repentance.

- **The enemies of God's people are God's enemies. He will war on behalf of his people.**
- **National prayer and mourning can avert national calamities.**
- **God's people will abide forever in His blessed land; but his enemies shall be an eternal desolation.**



## AMOS,

### The Prophet of Justice

In the history of Jehovah's worship, Amos, the prophet of Israel, stands first among the great preachers of reformation. Among other men, he towers above them as a giant in courage and faithfulness.

#### About the Author

The book is "the words of Amos" "the herdsman of Tekoa" (1:1). All that is known of the author is that revealed in this book. His home was Tekoa, a small mountain village, located 12 miles south of Jerusalem and some 22 miles from Bethel, the place where he delivered his message. Tekoa was situated in a lonely, sparsely populated district overlooking the wilderness of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea which lay some 18 miles away.

The name, "Amos," means "burden-bearer." We must not confuse him with Amoz, the father of Isaiah. The fact that his father's name is not mentioned suggests that he was probably from a poor, obscure family.

For his occupation, Amos was a shepherd of an ugly type of sheep called *noked* (7:14). They were noted for their fine wool. Also, he was a dresser of sycamore trees. These were not like our western sycamore trees; rather they were a poor quality of fig trees called mulberry figs. "Dresser" means pincher. The unripe figs had to be punctured to promote ripening. The fruit was infested with insects and inedible until the end was punctured so the gnats could escape.

Amos' ministry was unique. He declared that he "was no prophet, neither was (he) a prophet's son" (7:14). By that he meant that he was not a professional prophet nor had he been to a school for prophets (II Kings 2:3). Instead, God had specially called Amos for his mission to Bethel.

G. G. Findlay describes Amos as “a son of the wilderness... a man of granite make, stern, fearless, self-contained, of powerful, well-knit mind, vivid imagination and lofty bearing.” Amos was deeply devoted to God and his law. His preaching was blunt, courageous and dynamic. He was a powerful preacher of repentance. Someone has styled him “the plumb line preacher” (7:7). As was John the Baptist in the New Testament, so was Amos in the Old. Amos had first-rate oratorical powers. He used the Hebrew without blemish. His writings are judged by many to be the oldest of the prophets to have survived.

### **The Background of Amos’ Work**

**Politically**, Assyria had long been casting lustful eyes at the rich land of Israel. Jeroboam II had ascended Israel’s throne in 783 B.C., and ruled as a military despot. Uzziah had become king of Judah in c.a. 786 B.C. Both kingdoms enjoyed success and prosperity both politically and economically. With their prosperity came luxury and corruption in government and society. Justice was perverted. The poor were crushed and abused because of the greed of the wealthy.

**Religion** had degenerated into a commercial racket. In the public mind, Jehovah had been reduced to the level of a pagan god. People were careful for the outer forms of worship but inwardly were spiritually bankrupt. The impact of their religion on their daily lives was bad. It corrupted rather than elevated them.

The **mission** of Amos was to go to Bethel, the religious center of the Northern Kingdom, and proclaim the doom of the nation. So degenerate was Israel that nothing could forestall her judgment. His predictions were fulfilled within thirty years. Bethel, the site of Amos’ preaching, was small town located some ten miles north of Jerusalem. It was one of the major religious shrines of the Northern Kingdom. Its religious significance was long established since Jacob had his dream there, wherein he saw the ladder extending into heaven (Gen. 28:10-19). Jeroboam had made it a worship center by placing one of his golden calves there (1 Kings. 12:26-31).

The serious student will do well to read the **historical background** of Amos’ day as recorded in (II Chron. 26) and (II Kings 14:23-29). The message of Amos can only be understood in the light of his social, economic and historical background as mentioned above.

Amos is thought to have prophesied between 765 -750 B.C. His contemporaries were Hosea in the north and Isaiah and Micah in the south. It is possible that

he may have known Elisha and Jonah, both of whom would have been yet alive, albeit very old in his day.

### **About the Book of Amos**

The book bears the **name** of its inspired author.

The **literary qualities** of the book are noteworthy. Most of Amos' book is cast in poetic form. This is obscured in the King James and American Standard Versions but clarified in the Revised Standard Version. Amos' style reflects high literary ability. He is master in the use of metaphors, sarcasm, irony and parallelism. George Robinson observes that "He is the author of the purest and most classical Hebrew in the Old Testament." His style is simple and terse. In the words of G. Gilfillam, "As (Robert) Burns among the poets, is Amos among the prophets."

As to **date**, Amos' book is thought by many to be the earliest of the writing prophets to come down to us. Amos' words, "two years before the earthquake" (1:1) tell us that his book was not completed until at least two years following the oral delivery of his message.

Amos seems to have had a special fondness for the book of Deuteronomy as he alludes to it repeatedly. (Compare Amos 2:10 and Deuteronomy 29:5; Amos 4:10 and Deuteronomy 4:30; Amos 4:11 with Deuteronomy 29:22-23 and Amos 5:11 and Deuteronomy 28:30-39).

Twice we find Amos quoted **in the New Testament**. Stephen quotes Amos 5:24-27 in Acts 7:42-43. James cites Amos 9:11 in Acts. 15:16-18.

It is interesting to study the **contrasts between Amos and Hosea**.

1. Amos thundered the doom of Israel without a sigh, but Hosea did so with a broken heart
2. Amos had little to say about Baal, but to Hosea that was the root of all the problems.

Six **purposes** are discernable in the book.

1. He wrote to announce the coming judgment upon Israel because of their idolatry and sin;
2. To make plain to the people of Israel what the demands of God's service were;

3. To remind his people that God cares for all nations and exercises sovereignty over them;
4. To show that all nations are expected to respect such basic rules of human conduct as integrity, honesty, purity and fairness;
5. To point out that cruel, inhumane treatment of one's neighbor will negate all worship, no matter how elaborate it may be, and
6. To remind Israel of Jehovah's faithfulness to his covenant and law and their accountability to a practical observance thereof.

As is their usual custom, the **liberal critics** have presumed to dissect Amos' book, labeling parts of it as from some unknown latter source. Their conclusions are highly subjective and are built upon a contrived base. For a good analysis and refutation of their approach to Amos see Gleason Archer's **Survey of Old Testament Introduction**.

### **Some Miscellaneous Facts about the Book**

Theo Laetsch wrote that "never has the holy law of God been preached with greater earnestness and intensity than it was proclaimed by (this man), who spared neither rich nor poor, neither young nor old, neither vociferous rebel nor unctuous hypocrite." Amos charged his hearers with four great sins: materialism, oppression of their neighbors, moral decadence, and religious hypocrisy. These four evils are yet abundant in our contemporary society.

The prophet had no comforting words for those in adversity, only threats of vengeance and punishment for a sinful nation. His threats were realized when Tiglath-pileser of Assyria captured the northern portions of Israel in 734 B.C. Later in 722 Samaria, the capital, fell to Shalmaneser IV and Sargon II. Taken captive were 27,290 Israelites.

The writing of Amos has inspired numerous compliments from students of the prophets. Cornhill says, "Amos is one of the most wonderful appearances in the history of the human spirits." Unknown admirers have said, "Amos is the first of the great reformers" and "Amos towers in the distance like an earth-born Atlas..."

### **Keys That Unlock the Message of Amos**

There are two **key verses** in the book:

(5:24) “But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness are as a mighty stream.”

(8:2) “Then said Jehovah unto me, the end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.”

The **key word** of Amos is “punishment.”

The **key phrase** is “Thus saith Jehovah.”

The **key thought** is that God’s justice demands punishment upon Israel for their injustice.

The **key characters** are Amos, the shepherd, commissioned by God to be a prophet to Northern Israel and Amaziah, the corrupt priest of the Baal shrine at Bethel.

### **A Simple Analysis of Amos**

- I. Judgments Upon Nations (Chapter 1-2).
- II. Judgments Upon Israel (Chapters 3-6)
- III. Israel’s Doom Symbolized (7:1-9;10)
- IV. A Promise of Restoration (9:11-5).

## **EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF AMOS**

### **Introduction**

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, two years before the earthquake” (1:1). These words introduce the author and set the date for the giving of the prophecy. “Amos” means burden-bearer. He was a herdsman. It is not the usual word shepherd, “but one that marks a peculiar breed of sheep...that he tended” (F.C. Cook). The sheep were small and unsightly, but prized for the high quality of their wool. They were called “noked.” He likely tells us about his occupation to neutralize the criticism that he had become a prophet simply for the sake of bread (7:12). He already had an honorable occupation. He did not have to preach to make bread money.

Amos was from Tekoa, a small village in the rugged mountains 12 miles south of Jerusalem, and some 22 miles from Bethel. His home overlooked the wilderness of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. The ruins of ancient Tekoa yet bear that ancient name.

Amos “**saw**” his message before he proclaimed it. His words, came not from himself but were revealed to him by Jehovah. (Compare Isaiah 30:10). The subject of his prophecy is “**Israel,**” i.e., the Northern Kingdom ruled over by king Jeroboam.

He dates his prophecy by these chronological markers;

1. “The days Uzziah king of Judah,” i.e., 783-742 B.C. (**Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary**).
2. “In the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel,” i.e., 786-746 B.C.
3. “Two years before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah. No precise date can be set for the quake at this point. Zechariah was still talking about it in 520 B.C. (Zech. 14:5).

To appreciate the following record of Amos preaching experience at Bethel we must try to visualize the luxury and corruption of the royal city with its degrading system of Baal worship and the sensual crowd that had gathered there for their pagan festival. Into the city walks Amos, the shepherd. He was a rugged mountain man, dressed in a shepherd’s garb, likely with the smell of the sheepcote upon him. He is revolted at the sight he sees and the people probably despise the stranger. He stations himself at a busy place and begins to proclaim his message of judgment. To get a favorable hearing he lashes out against all of Israel’s hostile neighbors. The crowd nods and speaks its approval. He then blasts Judah their alienated kinsmen. That they really enjoy. Finally, when he has them eating out of his hand, he delivers the principal message he was sent to declare. Israel has grievously sinned and must now pay the cost. The people are stunned. For a moment they are speechless. They burn with shame. They grow angry. But God’s man had done his job. The word has been delivered. He emphasizes that God’s true message will be heard from Zion, i.e., Jerusalem, where his temple is situated and where David’s dynasty ruled rather than at Samaria or Bethel where idols were worshiped and where Jeroboam prevailed.

Most scholars, based on internal considerations, base the date of Amos between 765 and 750 B.C.

## **Declaration of Judgment Against the Nations for Their Crimes (1:2-2:16).**

**“And he said, Jehovah will roar from Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the pastures of the shepherds shall mourn and the top of Carmel shall wither” (1:2). “He said”** refers to the prophet Amos. He opens his proclamation with a bold metaphor calculated to grab the attention of the crowd. **“Jehovah will roar from Zion”** suggests that as the lion roars, striking terror into every living creature about, so will God roar. The lion roars when he leaps upon his victim. That God is going to roar implies that deadly judgments will immediately follow. Joel used similar imagery (Joel 3:16) so also Jeremiah (Jer. 25:30). Amos refers back to this phrase and explains that God’s roar is heard through the preaching of his faithful prophets. Normally, when a lion roars, an animal or a man perishes. When God roars, the pastures and the tree-covered mountains will wither as in a drought. The pastures likely refers to Amos’ home land near Tekoa. Carmel is a notable mountain on the Mediterranean coast in northern Israel. The following judgments spoken against six heathen neighbors, Judah and Israel are the message of God’s roar.

### **Judgment Against Syria**

**“Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Damascus yea for four, I will not turn away the punishment there of; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael and it shall devour the palaces of Benhadad. And I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven and him that holdeth the scepter from the house of Eden; and the people of Syria shall go into captivity” (1:3-5).** Amos uses a common formula to introduce each of the eight oracles of judgment, **“Thus saith Jehovah”** gives authority to his message by pointing to its source which is Jehovah, the great Ruler and Judge of all men and nations. He alone has the power to bring such dire threats to pass (Ps. 7:11-13). **“For three transgressions...yea for four”** should not be taken literally since he in seven cases mentions only one sin as typical of the wickedness of the nation and in the eighth case he lists six sins worthy of punishment. The meaning is that three such sins would render the subject worthy of punishment. Now they have committed four thus they are more than due their judgment (See Genesis 15:16 and Leviticus 18:25). The same figure of speech is used for blessings in (Job 5:19).

The nation under consideration is Syria, Israel’s neighbor to the northeast (see 1:3-4). He identifies her in several ways. He speaks of Damascus, the capital of Syria; the house of Hazael, the ruling dynasty of kings in Syria; the palaces

of Ben-Hadad who was the son of Hazael (II Kings 13:3); the inhabitants from the valley of Aven and him that holdeth the scepter from the house of Eden the precise location of these two places is unknown. Aven means vanity and is used by Hosea to shame those who had turned Bethel (house of God) into Bethaven (a house of vanity) because it had been made a center for idolatry (Hos. 4:15). The mention of **“him who holdeth the scepter from Eden”** suggests that it was one of the royal cities of the Syrian kingdom.

The sin of Syria which he singles out for condemnation is that **“they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron.”** This threshing instrument evidently consisted of a wheel or drum, in which were embedded iron spikes, which was driven over the sheaves of grain to crush them. The words are open to two possible interpretations;

1. The Syrians actually subjected some of their Jewish captives to a torturous death beneath such threshing machines. Such cruelties were not unknown in the ancient world;
2. He may be using a metaphorical expression that says the Syrians so desecrated Gilead it was crushed like threshed grain. This is implied in II Kings 13:7, “for the king of Syria destroyed them and made them like the dust in threshing.”

God would send conquering armies into Syria who would break the bars of their city gates, burn their palaces, cut off their people and take them into captivity into Kir. Amos sees the Syrians driven from their pleasant land and carried to Kir as prisoners of war. The site of Kir is uncertain. Isaiah mentions a Kir in Moab, a desolate desert region. The Moabites trafficked in prisoners of war sold into slavery. This may be the point Amos is making.

Some fifty years later, Syria received the threatened judgment at the hands of the Assyrians(II Kings 16:9).

### **Judgments Against the Philistines**

**“For three transgressions of Gaza... because, they carried away captive the whole people, to deliver them up to Edom. But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour the palaces thereof. And I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashkelon; and I will turn my hand against Ekron; and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord Jehovah”** (1:6-8). Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron were city states of the Philistine League. Gath is not here mentioned. It had likely already been destroyed (See 6:2). The Philistines were renowned for their military power and the strength



of their fortress cities, yet God promises to destroy them by fire, i.e., by war in which they would be burned. The crime of the Philistines was enslaving, i.e., selling “the whole people” to Edom. Two such raids by the Philistines are recorded (II Chron. 21:16-17; 28:16-18). They were indiscriminate in dealing with civilians taken in war. None were spared, young and old were led away. They were not taken as prisoners, but sold to the Edomites, inveterate enemies of the Hebrews, who would deal with them without mercy. For their cruelty even “the remnant of the Philistines shall perish” i.e. they would be totally annihilated as a nation. Both Assyria and Egypt inflicted severe penalties upon the Philistines but the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar pretty well destroyed them by defeat and mass deportation. Other prophets also predicted the fall of the Philistines (Is. 14:28-31; Jer. 25:20; 47:1-7; Ezek. 25:15-17; Zeph. 2:4-7; Zech. 9:5-8).

### **Judgments against Tyre**

**“For three transgressions of Tyre.... I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole people to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant. But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour the palaces thereof”** (1:9-10). Tyre was the principle city of Phoenicia. It was the head of a vast maritime fleet and a network of seaport colonies scattered around the Mediterranean. Her sin was the same as that of the Philistines, selling Hebrew slaves to Edom; It was exacerbated by the fact they had violated **“the brotherly covenant”** which had been established by David and king Hiram of Tyre (I Kings 5:1-12). That covenant evidently created a compact of mutual respect and assistance that would have especially forbidden slave raiding and trafficking. As God promised, Tyre repeatedly fell victim to her enemies. She was taken and burned by the Assyrians under Sargon (721-705 B.C.). Nebuchadnezzar besieged mainland Tyre for thirteen years (585-572 B.C.) and destroyed it. Alexander the Great took the island city after a seven month siege and utterly destroyed it (332 B.C.). God is not mocked. Other prophets predicted Tyre’s fall (See Isaiah 23:1-18; Jeremiah 27:1-11; Ezekiel 26:2-21; Joel 3:4-6).

### **Judgments against Edom**

**“For three transgressions of Edom...I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. But I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the palaces of Bozrah”** (1:11-12). Edomites were descended from Esau the brother of

Jacob. God forbade the Hebrews to take their land or harm them for they were brethren (Deut. 23:7). Their land was originally called Seir and was situated south of the Dead Sea. They did not view Israel as brethren but as despised foes and considered themselves in a state of perpetual war with them. No specific crime is mentioned, only the characteristics of their heart towards Israel. At every opportunity they pursued Hebrews with the sword. They cast off all pity, i.e., suppressed and stifled all sympathy or compassion. Their anger tore perpetually like a beast of prey tearing at its victim until it is totally devoured. Nothing is so cruel and vicious as a blood feud. Pusey notes the following worldly observations; "Fierce are the wars of brethren." Again he says "no love, well-nigh, is more faithful than that of brothers, so no hatred, when it hath once begun, is more unjust or fiercer." Christ demands that we not let the sun go down on our wrath (Eph. 4:26).

Teman was the southern district of Edom and Bozrah, a major city. They seem to stand by metonymy for the whole of the nation. Edom was driven out of her homeland by the Nabatean Arabs. In the fourth century B.C.. Judas Maccabeus defeated them, slaughtering some 20,000. John Hyrcanus, subjected them and forced them to be assimilated into Judaism. In the Jewish rebellion, the Roman finished exterminating their remnant. Other prophets condemned Edom and predicted her doom. (See Isaiah 34:5-9; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; Malachi 1:3-4).

### **Judgments against Ammon**

**"For three transgression, of the children of Ammon....I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they may enlarge their border. But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof; with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; and their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith Jehovah"** (1:13-15). The Ammonites were descended from Ben-Ammi, the son of Lot. Ammonites committed atrocities against defeated enemies such as disemboweling expecting mothers. Such terrorism was not limited to Ammon. Elisha predicted that Hazael, king of Syria would resort to this evil practice (II Kings 8:12) and Menahem so punished the mothers of Tiphseh (II Kings 15:16). The Ammonites used such terror to enlarge their borders; that is, to take the land of the Hebrews, subduing them by terror. The specific occasion of this event is not given. Perhaps they joined with Hazael of Syria in attacking Gilead (Compare II Kings 8:12; 10:32).

Rabbah was the capital of Ammon. It would be stormed, taken and burned by invading troops. Her king and princes would go into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian troops reduced Ammon and sent her residue into captivity (Ezek. 21:18-21).

### **Judgments upon Moab**

**“For three transgressions of Moab.....I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime. But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet; and I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof, and will slay all the princes thereof with him, saith Jehovah”** (2:1-3). Moabites occupied the land east of the Dead Sea and north of Edom. Moab, father of the tribe, was also a son of Lot by his daughter. Though kin to Israel, there was an implacable hatred toward them and hostility that never burned out. Moab is cited for one of her many infamous crimes; the dead body of the king of Edom had been desecrated by burning it to ashes. By burning them into lime, some supposed that they were then mixed with mortar and used in some building. Such a shocking and diabolic deed revealed an evil aspect of the nation's character. Judgment must come. Fires of war will devour her. Kerioth, chief city of Moab, would be destroyed. What nations sow they also reap (Gal. 6:7). Moab was the subject of other prophets as well. (See Isaiah 15:1-16:14; Jeremiah 48:1-47; Ezekiel 25:8-11; and Zephaniah 2:8-9).

### **Judgments upon Judah**

**“For three transgressions of Judah...I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have rejected the law of Jehovah and have not kept his statutes, and their lies have caused them to err, after which their fathers did walk. But I will send a fire upon Judah and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem”** (2:4-5). Given the rivalry and hostility of the Northern Kingdom toward the South we can imagine the evident approval on the faces of Amos' audience; the amens and perhaps even cheers as he lashed Judah for her sins. In a masterful way, he led them as a leader leads his animals to their fold.

The charge laid against Judah is not atrocity or violence, it is religious apostasy. They rejected the law of Jehovah. The law or Torah says Keil, “is the sum and substance of all the instructions and all the commandments which Jehovah had given to His people as the rule of life.” The statutes are the

individual precepts. The lies that caused them to err were their idols and the false religious system they had substituted for Jehovah's worship. The writer of Kings tells us that idolatry was wide spread in Judah during Uzziah's reign (II Kings 15:1-4). The judgment of Judah for her transgressions was the same as for her heathen neighbors. Fiery judgments of war would sweep over her. This occurred when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587/586 (See II Kings 25:8-12). It is noteworthy that nations that sinned without having God's written revelation were no less guilty than Judah who had the Law. (Compare Paul's teaching on this subject in Romans 2:11-16).

Having thoroughly disarmed his hearers and having won their attention by his sound thrashing of their neighbors, Amos turns to the business at hand.

### **Judgment Upon Israel**

**“For three transgressions of Israel...I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes-- they that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek; and a man and his father go unto the same maiden to profane my holy name and they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink the wine of such as have been fined”** (2:6-8). The ten northern tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam I, revolted against the house of David and established themselves as the Kingdom of Israel. (Compare I Kings 12:1-21). While rebelling against God politically, they also corrupted his worship by embracing the Baal worship of their heathen neighbors. Thus at Bethel Jeroboam I had set up one of his golden calves (I Kings 12:26-33). That pagan religion soon reflected itself in the moral, ethical life of the nation. From their many transgressions, he chooses a few examples.

1. They **abused the poor**, by selling them into servitude because of indebtedness. A poor man was allowed to sell himself into slavery in order to work out his debts (Lev. 25:39), but he was to be treated as a brother. No authorization however was given for the forcible selling of the poor. The guilt of the oppressors is exposed when he notes that for a trifling amount, the price of a pair of sandals, they would enslave a brother!
2. They were **guilty of land grabbing**. Micah also rebuked this sin; “they covet fields and seize them” (Mic. 2:2). Their greed is painted in hyperbolic strokes. They even demand the dust the poor farmer

cast on his head in mourning, when he saw his fate. (Compare Lamentations 2:10).

3. They **turned aside the way of the meek**. This refers to a corrupt legal system that allowed the wealthy and powerful to get unjust advantage over law-abiding citizens. (See Proverbs 17:23).
4. They were guilty of **blatant immorality**. “A son and his father go unto the same maiden” for sexual purposes. Such was considered incestuous under the law. (Compare Leviticus 18:7,15). This is an allusion to the ritual fornication of the Baal worship (See Hosea 4:14). Each shrine had its male and female prostitutes. Such immoral practices profaned God’s holy name because the degenerate worshippers claimed they were doing so in the name of Jehovah. It is important to note that the Hebrews did not renounce Jehovah in their apostasy. They simply embraced Baal practices and said that they were doing those things in service to Jehovah. This common practice is called **syncretism** which is the blending of two or more things together. Profanation of God’s name was strictly forbidden (Lev. 22:32)

In their ritual fornication they laid down beside the altar on a poor man’s cloak taken in pledge. If a man was so poor that all he had for collateral was his large outer cloak, it could be used but had to be returned to him at sundown (Deut. 24:12-13). This was because the cloak was also his blanket under which he slept at night. These wicked people had kept the poor man’s cloak overnight and used it for a pallet for their sinful indulgence lest their own cloak be soiled.

Note that Amos says these things were done **“in the house of their God.”** It was not Jehovah’s house, but the Baal shrines where such took place. Such practices had nothing to do with the righteous God of heaven.

Their Baal worship included indulgence in wine. Amos shames them for extracting unjust fines from their neighbors and then using the proceeds in worship. Such was an insult to God.

**“Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath. Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel?**

**saith Jehovah. But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying Prophecy not” (2:9-12).** In this section he stresses their utter ingratitude toward God who had done so much for them and their contempt toward his righteous servants.

**“Yet I destroyed the Amorite”** ties this paragraph with what had been previously noted. They had turned from Jehovah to embrace the religion of the local population whom he calls Amorites. Yet Jehovah had defeated the Amorites and shown their gods to be nothing but wood and stone. He was clearly superior to the legendary Baal gods. Amorite was technically the name of one group of the Canaanites. They were the mightiest of those tribes. By metonymy, Amos makes them stand for all the tribes that Jehovah had driven out (Deut. 1:20, 27). To emphasize how strong they were, he likens them to oaks and cedars. Their cedar trees were conifers growing 80-100 feet high. Moses tells us that the Canaanites were of unusually large stature. (Num. 13:32-33). Their great strength meant nothing to Jehovah who easily destroyed them (Josh. 10:12-21). To destroy their roots and fruits simply meant total destruction. Their tribe became extinct.

It was Jehovah not the Baal gods or Jeroboam’s calf that had brought their fathers out of Egypt and safely led them through the wilderness to their homeland (Exodus 20:2).

They showed their **ingratitude and contempt** for God by seeking to corrupt his holy servants, Nazirites, and prophets. Nazirites lived plain and simple lives for God. They abstained from all products of the vine including wine (Num. 1-12). Their abstinence was a constant reminder of the sins of indulgence of the people, hence they sought to corrupt the Nazirites. Heavy drinking was a problem Amos faced. (See 2:8, 4:1, 6:6).

They tried to silence the prophets that God sent to rebuke them. Isaiah rebuked the same sin (30:10). God sent the prophets to warn them lest they perish. They rejected God’s merciful gift.

**“Behold, I will press you in your place, as a cart presseth that is full of sheaves. And flight shall perish from the swift; and the strong shall not strengthen his force; neither shall the mighty deliver himself; neither shall he stand that handleth the bow, and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself; neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself; and he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith Jehovah” (2:13-16).** As a heavily loaded cart presses down the soft earth beneath its wheels so will God crush Israel. The KJV renders the lines **“Behold, I am pressed under you...”** If this be the correct reading, God

is saying that he is weary of dealing with the rebellious people. (See Isaiah 43:24).

Israel under Jeroboam was strong militarily (II Kings 14:23-28). They were confident that their mighty troops could deliver them from any enemy. With words describing their forces of war he predicts that all will perish. Kenneth Taylor captures the meaning of Amos' prophecies:

“Your swiftest warriors will stumble in flight. The strong will all be weak and the great ones can no longer save themselves. The archers aim will fail the swiftest runners won't be fast enough to flee and even the best of horsemen can't outrun the danger then. The most courageous of your mighty men will drop their weapons and run for their lives in that day (Living Bible 2:14-16).

### **Three Proclamations From God (3:1-6; 14).**

In the third chapter Amos stresses the necessity for judgment upon Israel. **“Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying, you only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities” (3:1-2).**

The rebuke, while spoken to Israel, includes Judah as well; **“the whole family.”** The Hebrews enjoyed special favors, privileges and standing with God. Of all the nations of earth he had selected them alone to be his covenant people. They thought that their election would spare them from judgment. The prophet corrects their faulty view by telling them that God would hold them more responsible precisely because they had enjoyed greater privileges. Judgment always begins at the house of God (I Pet. 4:17).

The prophet now asks a series of seven rhetorical questions which logically lead to the conclusion that his message is from God.

- 1. “Shall two walk together except they have agreed?”**
- 2. Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?**
- 3. Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have, taken nothing?**
- 4. Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is set for him?**
- 5. Shall a snare spring up from the ground and have taken nothing at all?**
- 6. Shall the trumpet be blown in a city and the people not be afraid?**

7. **Shall evil befall a city and Jehovah hath not done it?"** (3:3-6). The first five of these questions are drawn from Amos' experience in the wilderness country. The answer to all seven is *no!* He asks them not for information, but to emphasize his point which is *Every effect has a cause*.

**"Walk together"** is progressive imperfect and means "keep on walking together" (Laetsch). In the desert, people do not just happen to be together they must agree to be so. The two walking together are Jehovah and the prophet. The lion does not roar until he springs upon his prey. Like a lion, Jehovah has roared (3: 8). Israel's judgment has begun. A gin was a bird trap consisting of a net and a stick to act as a spring. His point is, the trap is not activated unless a bird has disturbed it. Israel would be snared in the net of her sins. He could be saying a bird does not get caught in a trap unless someone has set a trap. That someone is God. The trumpet he mentions is the alarm trumpet to warn the citizens of an impending invasion. Amos' message was that sound of warning. **"Shall evil befall a city and Jehovah hath not done it"** speaks not of moral or ethical evil but of calamity or overthrow (Josh. 23:15). These events are not just accidental or fortuitous, God rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan. 4:25).

**"Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?"** (3:7-8). Amos has come to them with his message of warning because God, who had ordained a judgment on Israel, has revealed it to him and it is his job to warn them. (See Ezekiel 33:11-12). God likewise warned the ancient world through Noah (II Pet. 2:5). The lion who has roared is the Lord Jehovah who has spoken. The prophet has no choice, he must prophesy, i.e., declare to them their coming doom!

**"Publish ye in the palaces at Ashdod and in the palaces in the land of Egypt and say, assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold, what great tumults are therein and what oppressions in the mist thereof. For they know not to do right saith Jehovah, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces"** (3:9-10). God, through his prophet, sends invitations to the heathen rulers of Ashdod (Philistines) and Egypt to come and be witnesses to the sins of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. **"Tumults"** speak of the disorders and confusion in the nation's capital where might is right and the weak are crushed by the powerful. So corrupt are they that they have no sense of morality or justice. Their hearts were seared as with a hot iron (I Tim. 4:2). Their palaces were filled with the spoils of violence and robbery. The effect is stated but the cause is intended.



By mentioning palaces we are led to understand that it was the rulers of Samaria that he had in mind.

**“Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; an adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy places shall be plundered”** (3: 11). The adversary that would plunder Samaria and the Northern Kingdom was Assyria. Amos made his pronouncement in c.a. 760-759. In 734 Tiglath-Pileser and his hordes took Galilee and Gilead. In 722 Samaria fell to Shalmaneser thus ending the Northern Kingdom.

**“Thus saith Jehovah: As the shepherd rescueth out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued that sit in Samaria in the corner of a couch and on the silken cushions of a bed”** (3:12). Again the prophet borrows from his life as a shepherd to illustrate his point. If a hired shepherd lost a sheep to a wild beast it was not enough simply to report it, he was to find the beast and victim and reclaim such pieces as he could. These were presented as proof of his report (Ex. 22:10-13). His point is that all that will be left of Jeroboam’s kingdom is a scattered remnant. The same thing later happened to Judah (II Kings 25:10-12). His references to their couches, and silken cushions is an allusion to their wealth and luxurious living. The word rendered, **“on the silken cushions of a bed”** are obscure in the Hebrew. The KJV renders them “in Damascus in a couch.” Jeroboam had conquered, Damascus and occupied it (II Kings 14:28). Perhaps he refers to those agents of the Northern Kingdom who had lived in luxury as they occupied the city of Damascus.

**“Hear ye and testify against the house of Jacob saith the Lord Jehovah, the God of hosts. For in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also visit the altar of Bethel and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground and I will smite the winter house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith Jehovah”** (3:13-15). The words **“Hear ye and testify”** (3:13), are spoken by God to Amos. **“God of host”** means God who leads the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:11-14). We can see the prophet casting his eyes about the sacred city of Bethel, pointing to its shrine and declaring in thunderous tones, **“God will visit the altars of Bethel with judgment!”** The horns of the altar were projections on each corner that resembled the horns of an ox. The blood of sacrifices was applied to the horns (Ex. 29:12). **“The horns of the altar”** have ever been considered a sanctuary (I Kings 2:28-30). By threatening to cut off the horns of their altar he is saying that there will be no place of refuge or sanctuary when God’s judgment comes. Their idolatrous

religion will be worthless in that day. Their **“winter houses and summer houses”** (3:15), alludes to their wealth. In those days few could afford two houses. They had gained their wealth by oppression and would lose it to the invading armies. **“Houses of ivory”** were decorated with ivory panels and furniture of inlaid ivory. Ahab had such a house (I Kings 22:39).

In chapter four, Amos tells his hearers that judgment is definitely coming upon them. They had better get ready for it. He opens with a ringing rebuke of the women of Samaria. **“Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan that are in the mountain of Samaria, that oppress the poor, that crush the needy, that say to their lords, Bring, and let us drink. The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks and your residue with fish-hooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, and every one straight before her, and ye shall cast yourselves into Harmon, saith Jehovah”** (4:1-3). **“Hear this word”** is a strong imperative to his audience that they pay attention to his message. **“Kine”** are cattle. **“Bashan”** was the region east of Jordon between Mount Herman and the mountains of Gilead renowned for its rich pasture land. He speaks not of four legged cows but of those wealthy women **“of Samaria that oppress the poor, that crush the needy, that say to their lords, Bring, and let us drink”** (4:1). Ezekiel called the mighty men and princes of Israel’s enemies, **“fatlings of Bashan”** (Ezek. 39:18). David spoke of his enemies as strong bulls of Bashan (Ps. 22:12). He uses this demeaning phrase to rebuke the wicked self-indulgent women who, by their insatiable demands, pushed their husbands to exact more from the suffering poor. Isaiah had a similar rebuke for the women of Israel (Is. 3:12; 32:9-11). **God swore by his holiness** (4:2), which they had offended and which was opposed to all for which they stood, that He would justly punish them. (See also Psalm 89:35).

The conquering Assyrians would take them away **“with fish-hooks”** (4:2). Hooks and fish-hooks are parallel with the same meaning. As fish are helpless when snared on a hook and their captor will certainly drag them out of their natural habitat, so will those proud women be snared when the Assyrians take them into captivity. Engravings discovered by archeologists show in vivid detail that the Assyrians did literally put hooks in the lips of some of their captives and led them by strings. Their **“residue”** most likely refers to their children and personal attendants. **“Breaches”** are gaps torn in the walls of their defeated city. His picture is, as the cowherd drives his cattle through a gap in a fence so the Assyrians will drive the fat kine of Samaria through the broken walls of Samaria. **“Everyone straight before her”** as a line of cows proceeds one after the other with eyes cast down. **“Ye shall cast yourselves into Harmon”** is considered by many scholars the most difficult verse in Amos.

This is because, the Hebrew text, is hopelessly, obscure. We are consoled by the fact that our understanding of the gist of Amos message is not affected if we cannot resolve these few words. Laetsch understands it to be Harman, the northern boundary of Bashan, through which they would pass when led away into captivity. This agrees with Amos' words in (5:27) **"I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus"** which is north of Harmon. The KJV renders it **"ye shall cast them into the palace."** Cook understands this to mean that the cruel wanton nobles of Samaria would be made slaves to serve in the palaces of their conquerors. That was a common practice in those days. The former seems more likely the meaning to this author.

With great and sarcastic irony Amos now addresses the pilgrims who had come to Bethel for worship. **"Come to Bethel and transgress; to Gilgal and multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning and your tithes every three days; and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened and proclaim freewill offerings and publish them; for this pleaseth you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah"** (4:4-5). As Amos witnesses the fervent activities of the priests and worshipers at Bethel, he rebukes them with words dripping with irony. "Go on in the path you have chosen for yourselves; go on disobeying God; go in your pretentious hypocrisy." He must not be understood as in anyway, endorsing or approving their actions. It is as when a parent, after repeated warnings, tell the child "go ahead and do it" implying that to do so will bring swift punishment for disobedience.

Bethel and Gilgal were places rich in the sacred history of the Hebrew people. At Bethel, Jacob saw, in a dream, the ladder extending into heaven with Jehovah standing at the top (Gen. 28:12, 18-19). At Gilgal (between Jericho and the Jordan River), the Hebrews first camped after crossing the river and renewed the covenant and rite of circumcision (Josh. 4:19, 5:3). Jeroboam had positioned one of his golden calves at Bethel. Gilgal also was devoted to idolatrous worship (See Hosea 4:15; 9:15). They went to these shrines to worship God, but Jehovah viewed it as transgression because it was contrary to his will. Jesus declares the same is true today (Matt. 7:21-23).

Amos proceeds to describe the extravagance of their worship, "sacrifices every morning" and "tithes every three days." The law called for a tithe for the poor every three years (Deut.14:28). Keil correctly observes that this should not be taken literally. "Amos speaks hyperbolically to depict the great zeal displayed in their worship." He is saying, even if you did this it would be of no value. The whole system is flawed at the heart. You only increase your sin by so doing!

The law forbade the use of leaven in loaves that were burned as thank-offerings (Lev. 7:11-12). Leaven was to be used in the loaf of the heave-offering given to the priest (Lev. 7:13-14). Worshipers at Bethel either defied God or perhaps they sought to go a little beyond duty and burn even some of the priest's loaf. In either event they sinned. Beyond the required worship, they offered abundant "freewill offerings." We can conclude from this that the worship of the Northern Kingdom was patterned largely after that of Moses' law. They did not totally reject it, they only mingled it with the Baal worship of their neighbors.

**"For this pleaseth you"** (4:5), tells, us God's evaluation of their worship. In the words of Paul, it was "will-worship" (Col. 2:23). "What they willed they kept of God's system and what they willed they rejected." This was the fundamental flaw of their religion and of modern denominational systems. Repetition in religious observances cannot compensate for a disobedient spirit (Matt.6:1-7).

The prophet now reminds his hearers of five previous judgments God had sent upon them and the fact that they had not learned from them nor repented. Therefore, only destruction was left (4:6-13). **"And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all of your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah"** (4: 6). Cleanness of teeth is an idiom for famine and scarcity of food. Without food to eat the teeth need no cleaning. Famine is one of God's four sore judgments (Ezek. 14:21). God sends hardships on people for a purpose, hoping that they will return unto him. Israel repeatedly ignored the warnings.

**"And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water and were not satisfied; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah"** (4:7-8). God withheld his blessing of rain as a chastisement for their sins. We must not conclude that every drought is such a punishment. Our present knowledge of meteorology helps us understand the cycles of rainfall. If every drought were a judgment from God, then water storage or irrigation would be attempts to thwart a punitive lesson from God. No believer would think this to be the case. On the other hand our modern knowledge must not lead us to the faulty conclusion that God cannot or will not use the elements to punish rebellious people. God withheld their needed rain! Sadly they ignored the warning.

**“I have smitten you with blasting and mildew. The multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees hath the palmer worm devoured; yet have ye not returned unto me...”** (4:9) **“Blasting”** is the result of the scorching hot winds that sometime blew from the Arabian desert, wilting the crops and causing them to die (Gen. 41:6) Mildew is a fungus that causes the grain to weaken, turn yellow and die without fruit. It usually comes when there is too much rain (Compare Deut. 28:22). The palmer worm refers to a form of locusts. The Hebrew word means **“Shearer”** (See Joel 1:4).

**“I have sent among you pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have carried away your horses; and I have made the stench of your camp to come up even into your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me...”** (4:10). Pestilence was the scourge of the ancient world. They did not understand how it was transmitted nor the conditions that were conducive to it. Neither did they have any treatment for it. It had to run its course, taking multitudes in its wake. Pliny, the Roman historian, styled Egypt as the mother of such pestilence. When God delivered Israel from Egypt he promised that none of the diseases of Egypt would be upon them, if they obeyed him. (Deut.7:15). On the other hand if they disobeyed him those plagues would overtake them (Deut. 28:58-60)

Their young men God caused to be slain by the sword of war. What God causes to be done, Scripture writers say He did. Their victorious enemies would take away their war horses and implements of war. Hazael of Syria conquered the North and left them but fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen (II Kings 13:3-7). The stench of decaying corpses and dead animals, following their defeat, did not teach them anything (Is. 34:3). Pestilence and war are among God’s four sore judgments (Ezek. 14:21).

**“I have overthrown cities among you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning...”** (4:11). Most all commentators agree that he speaks of earthquakes and the fires commonly resulting from them. To **“overthrow”** means literally to turn upside down (Cook). (Compare II Kings 21:13). When God threatened to turn Samaria upside down like a dish, this throws light on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25). The specific calamities Amos had in mind are not stated. Note how he has proceeded from the lesser to the greater judgments. We marvel at the blindness of those Hebrews who experienced all of those chastisements and yet returned not to God. Is our generation any more perceptive or penitent?

The prophet proceeds to draw the inevitable conclusion, **“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought; that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth—Jehovah, the God of hosts, is his name”** (4:12-13). Having persistently rebelled against Jehovah and having ignored his merciful warnings, Amos charges them to **“prepare to meet (their) God,”** to answer for their crimes. The judgment threatened will be far worse than all the others. Amos does not tell them what it will be. He leaves them to ponder, in suspense, their coming doom. We know from later history that it was the dismantling and destruction of their nation and the deportation of their people by the Assyrians. That began in 734 and was completed in 722 B.C.

Lest they think that they can escape their doom, he then describes in words of uncommon force and beauty the God to whom they must answer. God is omnipotent, **he forms great mountains and creates the wind**, an invisible, yet powerful and destructive force. He **declares man’s thought**. He is omniscient. He **maketh the morning darkness**. He providentially rules his creation. Morning is a symbol of hope and goodness whereas darkness symbolizes pain, sorrow, despair, destruction. He **treadeth upon the high places** as a victorious conqueror. **He is invincible**. Jehovah, the self-existing, unchanging one, is his name (Ex. 3:14-15). He is God of hosts, he **leads the armies of heaven** in crushing his enemies (See Habakkuk 3:12-15).

### **A Funeral Dirge for a Dying Nation (5:1-6:14)**

**“Hear ye this word which I take up for a lamentation over you, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise; she is cast down upon her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah; The, city that went forth a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went forth a hundred shall have ten left, to the house of Israel”** (5:1-3). **“Hear ye”** calls their attention to his doleful words. A **“lamentation”** is a song of mourning for the dead. Although the Northern Kingdom of Israel was in its heyday of power and prosperity, the intrepid prophet sings her death chant as a present reality.

Poetically he calls the population of the nation **“the virgin of Israel.”** This speaks not of their purity, for that had long since been lost. Rather, he means that up to this point she had been carefully guarded and sheltered by God. Isaiah used similar words for Babylon: **“sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon...for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate”** (Is. 47:1).

Using the prophetic perfect or “prolepsis,” he speaks of the nation **as already fallen**. Her wound is mortal. “She shall no more rise up.” She cannot save herself and **“there is none to raise her up.”** She had rejected her only hope, which was Jehovah.

**“The city that went forth a thousand”** refers to the number of military troops sent forth to battle (Compare I Samuel 8:20; 11:8). Only **“a hundred left”** suggests that their losses would be staggering. We should not interpret the number literally. He uses a metonymy, a definite for an indefinite number. The point made is their armies would be devastated. A small town would supply a hundred troops, a larger town a thousand.

**“For thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live; but seek not Bethel nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, and there be none to quench it in Bethel”** (5:4-6). While judgment tarries, God extends to them a gracious offer. If they turn back to him they shall live; if not, they will perish. The prophet uses an antithesis to make his point.

“Seek ye me (Jehovah) and ye shall live”

“Seek not Bethel (idolatry) for it cannot save.

Jehovah the only true God would not be found at Bethel, Gilgal etc. Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were centers of idol worship. Beersheba was sacred to the memory of the Hebrews. There Abraham called upon God (Gen. 26:23-25; 46:1-2). It later degenerated into a center of idolatry (II Kings 23:8). Beersheba was located in Judah some fifty-three miles southwest of Jerusalem. Doubtless some of the people of the North made the long pilgrimage to worship at Beersheba’s pagan shrine. Amos likely mentions this to shame them about Jeroboam I’s excuse for building the shrine at Bethel. **“It is too much for you”** he said, to go up to Jerusalem” (I Kings 12:28). It was too hard to go twelve miles to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah at his temple. but, not too hard to travel sixty five miles to Beersheba to worship at a forbidden shrine. This he says to shame them.

With a figure of speech called **paronomasia** he plays on the sound and meaning of Gilgal and Bethel. “Gilgal shall taste the gall of exile.” (G .A. Smith). “Bethel (house of God) shall become Bethel (a house of nothing).” Hosea made a similar play on the meaning of Bethel (Hos.10:5, 8).

**“The house of Joseph”** stands for the Northern Kingdom, Joseph being (the father of the founders of the two principal tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh.”

God’s wrath is often described as a raging fire (See Deuteronomy 4:24; Isaiah 10:17; Jeremaih 4:4). In those days, fire was much more disastrous and uncontrollable than in our day. It was greatly feared and once started, the destruction was usually total. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

**“Ye who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth, seek him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth (Jehovah in his name); that bringeth sudden destruction upon the strong so that destruction cometh upon the fortress”** (5:7-9). **“Wormwood”** is a bitter plant. Here it is used figuratively for injustice. What is more bitter than a corrupt court? **“Righteousness”** means “right doing.” This they had overthrown or cast to the ground. They put down righteousness and exalted wickedness in their courts.

For the third time, he urges them to seek God as their only hope of deliverance (Ps. 34:10). They are urged to seek Jehovah who has the power to create the heavenly bodies (**Pleiades and Orion**) and to destroy. Pleiades is the heavenly constellation called the seven stars or seven sisters. Job alludes to them (9:9; 38:31). Orion is the constellation sometimes called the giant. Amos’ point is that they should seek the mighty Creator who alone can save them. The **“shadow of death”** is the night which God turns to day. He **“calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth.”** This alludes to the moisture evaporated from the sea and returned to the earth in rain. This is a provision of the great Creator. Some take it to mean destructive tidal waves or hurricane-type storms. God’s destructive power cannot be resisted. It comes suddenly and unexpectedly (Matt.24:44). Even strong fortresses will crumble before him (5:9). He is almighty and irresistible.

**“They hate him that reproveth in the gate and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly”** (5: 10). The gate was the business center of a city. There kings held court (I Kings 22:10) and legal matters were pursued (Deut. 25:7). There prophets often resorted to declare God’s message (See Jeremiah 17:19; 19:2; Isaiah 29:21). **“Him that reproveth in the gate”** was the prophet Amos and any other faithful men of God sent to correct them. Rather than welcome them, the people hated them.

**“Forasmuch therefore as ye trample upon the poor and take exactions from him of wheat; ye have built houses of hewn stone but ye shall not**



**dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards but ye shall not drink the wine thereof. For I know how manifold are your transgression and how mighty are your sins—ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe and that turn aside the needy in the gate from their right” (5:11-12).** We can imagine the rustic prophet now stationed near the gate where judges conducted court. Pointing with his gnarled finger, he charges them with tramping the poor and unjustly taking even the food from the mouth of him and his family. Henderson takes the **“exactions”** to be exorbitant taxes. Laetsch and Pusey think it is interest on loans. The law forbade one to lend or take food for interest (Deut. 23:19). The average Hebrews lived in houses made of mud bricks (Is. 9:10). Only the wealthy could afford houses of cut stone. We should not summarily condemn those with wealth and fine houses. It is how they acquire they wealth and use it that makes it good or bad. To prosper at the unjust expense of the poor is always wrong. Oppressing the poor is a perennial problem of ancient and modern civilizations. The Psalms, the Proverbs, and the Prophets abound with references to this sin (Ps. 10:9; Prov. 22:16; Is. 3:14, 15). **“He that oppressteth the poor reproacheth his Maker”** (Prov. 14:31). As a just reward for their ill-gotten gain they will not live to enjoy their fine homes and the produce of their vineyards. This threat is taken from (Deut. 28:38-45).

**“For I know”** your transgressions, stresses God’s omniscience. Nothing can be hidden from him. He knew all about their secret bribes and private agreements made with judges and lawyers to get advantage over the righteous poor (Comp. I Samuel 12:3-4). Job is a good example of how a righteous man deals with his poor neighbors (Job 31:16-22).

Amos refers to himself in verse 13, observing that from the world’s point of view, he would be wise to keep silent. Perhaps he is repeating what someone was overheard to say. As he said earlier, **“Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?”** (3:8). In the words of Jeremiah, God’s word was like fire (fever) in his bones it had to come out (Jer. 20:9).

Having rebuked their sins, he offers an exhortation: **“Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so Jehovah the God of hosts, will be with you as ye say. Hate the evil and love the good and establish justice in the gate; it may be that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph”** (5:14-15). In these lines the prophet makes clear that religion and morality are inseparable. If one is seeking good he will naturally hate evil. In a day when religious folks want to constantly hear about love, they need to be reminded that being godly involves hating the things God hates. (Comp. Proverbs 6:16-19; Malachi 2:16; Hebrews 1:9). The specific thing that they should seek and love was **“justice in the gate”** or courts! Likewise they should hate and abhor

injustice. If that glaring social wrong could be corrected forthwith, **“it may be that Jehovah.... will be gracious unto the remnant...”** While it is too late to avert judgment, with proper repentance, God would save a remnant of the nation. **“Joseph,”** the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, stands for the Northern Kingdom.

With prophetic vision Amos sees the mourning their sin will bring. **“Therefore thus saith Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord; Wailing shall be in all the broad ways; and they shall say in all the streets, Alas! And they shall call the husbandman to mourning and such as are skillful in lamentation to wailing; and in all vineyards shall be wailing; for I will pass through the midst of thee, saith Jehovah”** (5:16-17). People would mourn for their losses in the coming war of judgment. Husbands, sons and fathers would be slain or captured in combat, cities would be burned, homes rifled, women ravished and captives taken. A similar prophetic picture is given by Zechariah of Jerusalem’s fate at the hands of the Romans (Zech. 14:1-2). Those **“skillful in lamentation”** were the professional mourners who were a common part of ancient society (See Jeremiah 9:17-18). Such pitiful mourning is reflected in Jeremiah’s **Lamentations** which describes the horrible plight of the survivors after Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar’s troops. The reason they will mourn is, **“for I will pass through the midst of thee, saith Jehovah.”** It will be as when He passed through Egypt and smote their first born (Ex. 12:12). Then he passed over Israel and smote Egypt, now Israel, will feel his wrath.

Amos now delivers two “woes” upon his hearers: **“Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! Wherefore would you have the day of Jehovah? It is darkness and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him, shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness and not light? even very dark and no brightness in it?”** (5:18-20). Perhaps some in the audience had responded to his warnings by saying, “Let the day of the Lord come we are ready for it” or “We are God’s chosen people. When the day of the Lord comes he will bless and save us.” To this he sharply responds. With his **“woe to you”** he points out that the day of the Lord will be different than they think. It will not be one of light and blessing but a dark night of suffering. Jeremiah encountered this same spirit in Jerusalem (Jer. 17:15). Amos then uses a homely illustration from the wilderness country to show that they would in no wise escape the judgment. He describes a man out in the countryside when suddenly he is confronted by a lion, in panic he turns and flees for his life. Just when he thinks he is safe he meets a ferocious bear. With heart pounding, he finally makes it to the safety of his house. Panting, he leans for rest upon the rock wall and from between the cracks a deadly viper strikes him. For all of

his efforts to escape death, it finally caught him. So will God's judgment find every sinner in Israel. The day of which he speaks is the day when Assyria will destroy their nation and take them into captivity.

Like most people, the people of Israel falsely assumed that sin, rebellion and disobedience could be atoned for by elaborate ritual and effusive religious observances. To this attitude the prophet, addresses himself. He represents God as saying, **"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream"** (5: 21-24). Sinful man, tends to think that God is a beggar who is obliged to cheerfully accept any scrap thrown to him. Amos makes it clear that such is not the case. God hates hypocritical, insincere worship. He will not accept it, nor bestow blessings upon such worshipers. Other prophets made the same point about worship. (See Isaiah 1:11-17, Malachi 1:6-10). **"Feasts"** refers to their great annual festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Lev. 23:1ff). **"Solemn assemblies"** refers to their gatherings for the ceremonies of those feasts (Lev. 23:36). **"Burnt-offerings"** are described in Leviticus chapter 3. **"Meal-offerings"** are sometimes translated "meat-offerings" but they involved neither blood nor meat. They consisted of cereals or grains. It was always accompanied by a whole burnt-offering or peace-offering. (See Leviticus 2:1-4; Numbers 15:1-6). **"Peace-offerings"** were animal sacrifices presented to God, but eaten by the priest and the worshipers.

A **"viol"** was a kind of harp frequently used in worship (Ps. 150:3-4). Their worship was lavish, the ritual no doubt beautiful but it was rejected because their lives did not measure up to God's standard. Amos must not be understood as condemning true, scriptural worship. God actively seeks true worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Liberal writers seize verses such as these to argue that all worship is useless. Such exegesis reveals much about the state of their hearts. That which nullified their worship was their wicked life style and the way they treated their neighbors. Therefore he challenges them to **"let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness are a mighty stream."** These words need still to be emblazoned on every house of worship and in every human heart. With this statement, Amos erected a monument that will honor his name until the Lord comes.

Continuing his reproof of their false worship, he says, **"Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"**

**Yea, ye have borne the tabernacle of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore, will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah whose name is the God of hosts” (5: 25-27).** Verses 25 and 26 have been the occasion for thousands of hours of study on the part of commentators. Two possible meanings are seen for verse 25.

1. **“Did ye bring unto me (Jehovah) sacrifices in the wilderness”** he asks, or were, they really for the idol gods you knew in Egypt?
2. It could be elliptical; **“Did ye bring unto me *only* sacrifices....in the wilderness”** or did you not have to obey me as well. The author omits a word, (in this case it is *only*), not by accident. Similar usage on the same subject is seen in I Samuel 15:22. **“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice (only)....”** Jeremiah also in 7:22 of his book uses this devise. **“For I spake not unto your fathers....concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices (only).”** We know that he certainly did speak to them of sacrifices (Lev. 1:1ff).

Given the context of the proceeding verses, (5: 21-24), it seems that he is saying that God has never been satisfied with sacrifices and ritual alone, but has always expected personal righteousness and social justice as well. Given the verse following he seems to say that” **from the beginning you Hebrews have been idolatrous at heart, even though you worshiped me outwardly.”** Centuries and scholarship have yet to settle the point absolutely.

There is uncertainty as to the time-frame of 5:26. **“In the Hebrew it is simply *and ye bare*”** (Cook). The KJV and ASV render it **“ye have borne”** which can mean that the Hebrews, as a race, practiced idolatry even during the wilderness wandering or that those of the Northern Kingdom, to whom Amos spoke, were guilty of idolatry. Both of these points are true. The RSV and the NEB both reflect this idea. **“But now you shall take up the shrine of your idol...(NEB).** That is to say **“if you want to worship idols you can take them with you when you go into captivity.”** That Israel was prone to idolatry from earliest times is fact. The golden calf was made and worshiped while Moses was yet on the mount (Ex. 32:1-6). In Deuteronomy 32:17, Moses looks back over the past forty years and reminds them that they had clung to their idols. Ezekiel makes the same charge in chapter 20:16 of his book.

Amos now offers specific facts to substantiate his allegations **“ye have borne the tabernacle of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of your god”** (ASV). The difficulty of these words is seen in the variety of translations;

“ye have borne the tabernacle of your Molock and Chium your images, the star of your god” (KJV)

“you shall take up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star” god your images (RSV)

“you shall take up the shrine of your idol king and the pedestals of you images” (NEB)

The ASV and NEB seem to best convey the meaning.

“**Tabernacle**” refers to a portable booth in which the idol was housed. Such, were common among the pagans in those days. The word rendered “**shrine**” (ASV) is better rendered “pedestal” in the NEB. This was the stand on which the image rested when in camp. This is Keil’s understanding. The KJV and RSV translators took the words for tabernacle and pedestal as proper names for their gods.

The only hint as to the nature of their idolatry is in the expression “star of your god.” This implies it was astral worship which was evidently a problem during the Exodus. Moses saw fit to warn them against worshiping the sun, moon and stars (Deut. 4:19). All of their Canaanite neighbors adored the heavenly bodies; the Assyrians’ system of idolatry was built upon worship of the heavenly orbs. The NEB seem correct in saying “but now you shall take up the shrine of your idol king and the pedestal of your images.....and I will drive you into exile beyond Damascus” i.e. into Assyria. Amos reminds them that this is no idle threat for God is its author. Stephen cites these words from Amos in his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:40-43). He uses the words of the Septuagint.

Amos’ second woe rebukes the rulers for their sins of pride, indulgence and false security. “**Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!**” (6:1). God’s prophet spares neither the rulers of Jerusalem nor Samaria, denouncing all of them. “**At ease**” means ‘secure.’ He is rebuking the false sense of security that both sets of rulers were displaying. Words of warnings about a coming day of Jehovah did not faze them. Both nations were enjoying a high degree of economic and military strength in Amos’ day. With their fortress cities, they felt invincible. “**Notable men**” means distinguished and renowned. The same word is used by Moses to identify the princes of the tribes (Num. 1:17). They thought of themselves as “**the chief (men) of the nations**” i.e. the choicest. The house of Israel came to them for advice and leadership.

He then urges them to consider three contemporary examples; Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. Calneh was to the east on the Tigris. One had to “pass over” the Euphrates to get there. Hamath was situated on the Orontes River in Syria, north of Israel. Gath was a Philistine city state south and west, near the Mediterranean coast. Each of these cities had been strong, fortified and prosperous. Hamath had recently been taken by Jeroboam II (II Kings 14:25, 28). Gath had fallen to Uzziah of Judah (II Chron. 26:6). Calneh’s history was that of being ravaged by first one enemy and then another. Some scholars identify Calneh with Kollani, north of Hamath (see Laetsch). If these powerful kingdoms had fallen, in their own day, why should they think that they would fare better? Taylor paraphrases it well. “Once they were better and greater than you, but look at them now.”

He continues his rebuke of the rulers, “--ye, **that put far away the evil day and cause the seat of violence to come near**” (6:3). They refused to believe that God would destroy them or that they could be brought down. As in Ezekiel’s day, they said, “the vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of times that are far off” (Ezek. 12:27). (See also II Peter 3:3-4). They refused to face the possibility and reality of a coming judgment. They continued to indulge themselves and actually “**caused the seat of violence to come near,**” even sooner and more certainly. The word rendered “**seat**” of violence means, the sitting, dwelling or throne” (Laetsch). It is noteworthy that the Assyrian monarchs carried their thrones with them into battle and sat upon them when observing or administering judgment following the battle (Rawlinson). This may be his point.

Five examples of their indulgence are cited. “**That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that sing idle songs to the sound of the viol; that invent for themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph**” (6:4-6). He describes the life style of the rich and powerful. The masses knew no such luxury. The things listed were not sinful in and of themselves. It was not evil to rest on a bed of ivory or to eat beef and mutton etc. It was wrong because they were not grieved or concerned about the sad state of affairs in the nation. “**Beds of ivory**” were wooden frames decorated with inlaid ivory. They lounged on couches while they ate and relaxed.

Verse 5 has frequently been used to try to show that God disapproved of David’s introduction of instrumental music into the worship of God. Such an interpretation is faulty.

1. This speaks of the banqueting and entertainment of the rich, not worship.
2. If it was wrong on the basis of this verse for David to use instruments, it was also wrong to lie on couches and eat beef, mutton, etc.
3. David introduced instrumental music into temple worship because “the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets” (II Chron. 29:25).
4. If it was sinful for Israel to use instruments of music in worship then the Holy Spirit inspired the psalmist to encourage them to sin by saying “Praise ye Jehovah....with stringed instruments” (Ps. 150). Such could not possibly be the case. The fact is, this passage is not discussing the use or non-use of musical instruments in worship. The New Testament church uses no musical instruments because Christ has not authorized their use (Matt. 28:18, 20; II John 9).

**“Therefore shall they now go captive with the first that go captive; and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away” (6:7 ).** His conclusion is drawn and his point made; those careless, indulgent rulers will be in the forefront of those marched away into captivity. The Assyrian’s policy was to deport and resettle, in distant lands, the people they conquered (II Kings 17:5-6) Their revelry will be a sad bitter memory as they are marched away in chains, knowing that because of their sinful indulgence God had destroyed their nation.

**“The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by himself, saith Jehovah, the God of hosts; I abhor the excellency of Jacob and hate his palaces; therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein” (6:8).** God swore by himself since there is no higher authority by which to swear (Heb. 6:13). **“The excellency of Jacob”** refers to their national pride. (See the footnote). Hosea saw and condemned that pride (5:5; 7:10). Jeremiah dealt with the same problem in Judah (13:9). It was not a wholesome sense of self-worth which he condemned, but an arrogant, false pride based on their feelings of national superiority. God hated their hollow insincere worship (5:21) their pride and their grand palaces.

**“And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house that they shall die. And when a man’s uncle shall take him up, even he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is the innermost parts of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No; then shall he say, Hold thy peace; for we may not make mention of the name of Jehovah” (6:9-10).** With graphic, chilling

strokes, Amos describes the horrors of the coming judgment. Assyria's siege of Samaria would last three years. He sees ten survivors huddled in one house. Perhaps in one of the palaces mentioned above. One by one they succumb to starvation and the ever present plague that accompanied siege warfare. All immediate family members have perished. An uncle, the nearest surviving relative, comes with "a burner" whose job it is to dispose of the corpses. When nine have been removed, the burner discovers the last one yet alive, "**in the innermost parts of the house,**" i.e., the farthest corner. He asks him, "**Is there yet any with thee?**" And the pitiful emaciated survivor whispers, No. Perhaps the poor fellow began thank God that they had found him. Please, the uncle interrupts, "**Hold thy peace,**" i.e., "hush," we may not mention the name of Jehovah. The likely reason being a matter of fear lest Jehovah's attention be called "to the survivor and he too be smitten.

Then in solemn, doleful tones Amos says, "**For, behold, Jehovah commandeth. And the great house shall be smitten with breaches, and the little house with clefts**" (6:11). The judgment will smite all, great and small. They will be beaten to dust. The RSV renders it "fragments and bits."

This section closes with two rhetorical questions, a rebuke and a promise of doom. "**Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? that ye have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into worm-wood; ye that rejoice in a thing of nought, that say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entrance of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah**" (vs. 12-14). No right-thinking person would run his horse upon a rock lest he fall and break a leg or shatter his hooves nor would one plow on a rock lest he break his plow. But Israel has followed a course just as stupid. Four instances are cited;

1. They have turned justice into the bitter gall of injustice;
2. Righteousness they have turned into hemlock (a poisonous plant) of unrighteousness;
3. They rejoice in idols which are things of nought (nothing);
4. They have boasted that they had taken **horns of power by their own strength**. Horns were considered symbols of power. By their own strength meant they thought they were strong enough that they did not need God (Deut. 33:7; I Kings 22:11). This boast probably refers to their recent victories over Syria whereby their ancient border had been restored (II Kings 14:25-28).



To reward their wickedness; God would raise up Assyria and whip them from Hamath, their northern boundary, to the brook of the Arabah, their southern boundary below the Dead Sea.

### **Five Visions of Judgment (7:1-9; 10).**

**“Thus the Lord Jehovah showed me; and behold, he formed locust in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and lo it was after the king’s mowings. And it came to pass that when they made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord Jehovah, forgive, I beseech thee; how shall Jacob stand? for he is small. Jehovah repented concerning this: it shall not be, saith Jehovah”** (7:1-3). Amos stresses in each of these messages that **“the Lord showed me.”** They were not tales or speculations of his own contrivance. The same is true of all the writers of scripture. David said **“The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his word was upon my tongue”** (II Sam. 23:2). Paul wrote, **“which things we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words”** (I Cor. 2:13). Then he reminded them that the things he wrote **“are the commandment of the Lord”** (I Cor. 14:37). In Peter’s words, **“men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit”** (II Pet. 1:21) Faithfulness to God involves belief in the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God.

It is important to note that Amos relates to us a vision, not an historical event that had occurred. This is evident from verse three where God repented and said **“it shall not be.”** Locust plagues were the scourge of the eastern people. Before the days of pesticides and crop dusting, the people were helpless against the invading horde. They would literally strip the land bare of vegetation, even barking the trees. The Lord **“formed”** the locust. Clearly Amos had pointed their attention to God who formed the mountains (4:13) and the heavenly orbs (5:8). Now he reminds them that even the tiny grasshopper is the product of God’s power. Further all the works of his hand, exist to serve him. In the face of a God so awesome, with such inexhaustible resources, how can they expect to successfully ignore or resist him?

He sees the hay fields. The first mowing had been completed. It went to the king as a tax or levy (See I Kings 4:27, 18:5). **“The latter growth”** would be the second and last mowing before the long dry summer season set in. If this crop failed, the common people would be in great distress. Remember, locust eat not only hay but every green plant. Seeing this coming disaster, Amos cries out, **“O Lord Jehovah forgive, I beseech thee.”** Intercession was part

of a prophet's work. So did Moses (Num. 14:19) and Samuel (I Sam. 7:8) and Jeremiah (14:19-22). The prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Jas. 5:16).

Jehovah heard and honored Amos' prayer and **“repented concerning this.”** He suspended the planned judgment. Infidels and skeptics pounce on this and similar verses, attempting to find a contradiction and discredit God. They cite, **“God is not a man.....that he should repent”** (Num. 23:19). The answer is simple. The holy and righteous God commits no sin for which he needs to repent. He does however, alter his course of action as a wise ruler. In this vision we see God's mercy in restraining judgment.

**“and behold, the Lord Jehovah called to contend by fire; and it devoured the great deep, and would have eaten up the land. Then said I, O Lord Jehovah, cease, I beseech thee; how shall Jacob stand? for he is small. Jehovah repented concerning this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord Jehovah”** (7:4-6). The fire that devoured the great deep (large bodies of water) and would have eaten up the land, is an extended drought. Realizing the awful damage a prolonged drought would do and the suffering that would result therefrom, again the prophet successfully intercedes. Not only for nations, but for individuals should we intercede (I John 5:16).

Again, we remind our readers that this was a vision Amos saw, not a particular historical event. **“Thus he showed me; and behold, the Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And Jehovah said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more; and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword”** (7:7-9). Before, Amos saw locusts and drought as God's agents of destruction. In this vision, the Lord himself is seen inspecting the nation. In his hand is a plumb-line, i.e., a string with a metal weight attached at one end which is used to measure and determine the vertical straightness of a wall. We call the metal weight a **“plumb-bob.”** A wall that is standing properly is said to be plumb. Such measuring devices were used in erecting walls. They were also used to determine if a wall was leaning and therefore in need of demolition (See II Kings 21:13; Isaiah 34:11). The wall stands for the Northern Kingdom. The plumb-line represents God's, word his righteous standard of judgment. The nation was out of plumb. God had confirmed it and would call for its demolition. Twice judgment had been deferred through the intercession of Amos. Now it must come. We are reminded of his earlier words **“for three transgressions of Israel, yea for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof”** (2:6).

**“The high places of Isaac”** stand parallel to “the sanctuaries of Israel.” He refers to their centers of idolatry. He likely calls them by Isaac’s name for that patriarch had worshiped God faithfully in the very place, such as Beersheba, where they now worshiped idols (Compare Genesis 26:23-25; Amos 5:5, 8:14). The house of Jeroboam suffered this violence when, Zechariah, was assassinated by Shallum (II Kings 15:8-12). His death fulfilled yet another prophecy spoken to Jehu, founder of the dynasty, that his sons would reign to the fourth generation (II Kings 10:30).

This threat against the house of Jeroboam provoked an immediate response by the priestly guardian of Bethel’s shrine. **“Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam the king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land”** (7:10-11). Rankled at Amos’ preaching and concerned by the attention he was getting, Amaziah sends a message hurriedly to the king. He was seeking relief; perhaps an injunction prohibiting Amos’ preaching or better still his arrest. As is typical of corrupt professionals, Amaziah painted Amos’ preaching in the darkest colors, not hesitating to shade it to gain a favorable response. He falsely asserts that Amos was part of a conspiracy, which would involve others in some planned criminal activity. He took Amos’ warning against the dynasty and said that Amos had threatened the king’s life. He failed to note the basis of the prophet’s threat of captivity and that it was conditional. National repentance could help their situation (5:14-15). He did not tell the king that God had said these things, only that Amos had done so. **“The land is not able to bear all his words”** means “we cannot afford to tolerate such preaching.” Opponents of reformation frequently protest that such change would be destructive to the society and government.

**“Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thou away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a royal house”** (7:12-13). It is noteworthy that Jeroboam evidently took no notice of Amaziah’s urgent communiqué. Either he did not view Amos as a threat or he hesitated to challenge a prophet of God. Perhaps he recalled how a prophet from Judah had dealt with the first Jeroboam at that very place. (I Kings 13:1-6). Such information would temper even a king’s reaction. Not getting the desired results from the king, Amaziah proceeded to deal with the pesky prophet personally. **“flee thou away into the land of Judah”** means literally, “flee for thy profit” or as we would say, “if you know what is good for you, you will get out of here.”

The word “**seer**” from the Hebrew *hozeh*, a word frequently used for prophets because they saw visions (I Sam. 9:9; II Sam. 24:11). The pagan priest urged Amos to go back to Judah, his homeland where such preaching as his would be acceptable. He later told him that he was *persona non grata* in Bethel. He then added an insult by suggesting the Amos’ motivation was for “**bread**,” i.e., food for his belly. Then as now, there were mercenary prophets in the land. Micah speaks of corrupt prophets that “divine for money” (Mic.3:5-11). Being a priest who served for hire, Amaziah wrongly assumed Amos to be cut of the same cloth.

Bethel was “**the king’s sanctuary**,” i.e., a sanctuary founded by and governed by the king as the principle seat of worship in his land. Amaziah spoke better than he knew. It surely was Jeroboam’s and not Jehovah’s sanctuary. God’s house was at Jerusalem (I Chron. 23:25). That which is human in origin will forever remain human. It was “**a royal house**” which means that the king had a residence there. While the chief seat of political power was at Samaria, the king had residences in other places for his enjoyment. Earlier, Amos had mentioned summer houses and winter houses (3:15).

**“Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees; and Jehovah took me from following the flock, and Jehovah said unto me, Go prophecy unto my people Israel”** (7:14-15). We thrill at the response of Amos to the threats, insults and prohibitions of the corrupt priest. Imagine the rustic shepherd, staff in hand, as he straightens himself and fastens his unblinking, piercing eyes on the gorgeously arrayed Amaziah. With firm measured tones his answers first his insult that he was preaching or prophesying for bread. He was not a prophet by profession or training. The rebellious kings of Israel kept a large band of time-serving prophets on payroll to preach the king’s will to the people (I Kings 18:19; 22:6). This kind of prophet Amos was not. We should not conclude, as do some liberals, that Amos repudiates and indicts all prophets with these words, only those who are false. Such false prophets did their work in view of the financial reward it would bring them (See Jeremiah 6:13-14; Micah 3:5, 11).

**“A prophet’s son”** is a disciple or student of a school of the prophets. Such schools existed from the days of Samuel (I Sam. 19:19-21; II King’s 2:3-7). Doubtless, young men of spiritual inclination went to these schools to study at the feet of great prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. Amos had not gone to school to become a prophet. Jehovah had specially called him for his task and given him his message. As to Amaziah’s assertion that he was looking for bread, Amos informs him that he had an honorable occupation as a shepherd

and tender of sycamore fig trees. Among the Hebrews, shepherds were common and respected. David had secured them a place of honor in the eyes of the people. His use of the word **noked**, rendered “flock,” provides a clue for the variety of sheep he kept. **Noked’s** are a small ugly sheep with a highly valued, superior coat of wool. The **sycamore tree**, of which he spoke, is the sycamore fig (not to be confused with our American sycamore). It is a large tree reaching up to fifty feet in height. It has a fruit similar to the mulberry fig but of inferior quality and eaten only by the poor. The fruit was dressed by pinching or puncturing the end of the fruit to allow insects to escape and to hasten ripening. God had specifically commissioned this rugged man of the wilderness to **“Go prophesy unto my people Israel.”**

As the prophet responded directly to the corrupt priest, his words of bold confidence sent a shudder through the body of Amaziah. **“Now therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah; Thou saith Prophecy not against Israel and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac”** (7:16). God had said, “Go prophesy unto my people Israel.” Amaziah had said “Prophecy not against Israel.” The unspoken question rings out, who should a prophet, obey? How dare a mortal man contradict the command of the living God?

We can visualize Amos taking a step nearer to Amaziah, extending his finger to touch his chest and saying, **“therefore, thus saith Jehovah: Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou thyself shalt die in a land unclean, and Israel shall be led away captive out of his land”** (7:17). In the coming fall of the nation to the Assyrian invaders, his wife would be forced by the extremities and hardships to sell herself in order to survive. His children would perish in the battle. His property would be apportioned to foreigners whom the Assyrians would send to occupy the land. Amaziah would be led away captive to a foreign land from which he would never return. To the Hebrews every land beyond their own was unclean, polluted by the heathen population and their customs. He ends his solemn pronouncement with the very words that Amaziah had reported to Jeroboam **“Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land.”** We can well imagine Amaziah standing there, thunderstruck and speechless. With a gulp, he slowly backs away and with trembling heart makes his way to his chamber. Like a mighty warrior, Amos emerges from the battle arena unscathed, the enemy humiliated and driven from the field.

He now reverts to his visions of judgment. **“Thus the Lord Jehovah showed me: and, behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a basket of summer fruit. Then said Jehovah unto me,**

**The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them anymore. And the songs of the temple shall be wailings in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah; the dead bodies shall be many; in every place they shall cast them forth with silence” (8:1-3).** Having routed Amaziah, Amos turned back to the crowd that had gathered and related his fourth vision. **“Summer fruit”** was the fruit gathered in the summer, the last thing to be harvested in the Hebrew agricultural cycle. As summer fruit meant the end of the growing life of the fruit, so it symbolized the end of the northern kingdom. Here again, Amos plays on the sound and spelling of the words **“Summer fruit *kayitz*”** and **“end *qets*”** (Laetsch). The end he sees is the judgment and destruction of their nation by the Assyrians.

God **“will not again pass by them anymore.”** In the earlier visions, twice he saw judgment deferred, but now justice demands it be exacted (Compare 7:3,6,8). It is now too late to avert it. The word **“temple”** is the same as **“palace”** (See foot note). If he means temple, the praise songs celebrating Baal’s gifts will turn into shrieks and howls of terror and anguish; if he means **“palace,”** their songs of merriment and entertainment will be turned into cries of anguish when the alien armies overrun them. The vision is ghostly. He sees the horrible aftermath of the siege and dead bodies everywhere, victims of famine, pestilence and sword, God’s agents of judgment (Ezek. 14:21). So numerous are the corpses that proper burial is impossible. The pitiful survivors cast them out of their midst. Shock, sorrow and misery weigh so heavily on the workers that not a word of mourning, prayer or eulogy is spoken.

**“Hear this, O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, saying, when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with the balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (8: 4-6).** The prophet then turned his broadside against the greedy merchants of the land. They swallow up, literally **“pant after,”** the poor like a ravening beast does his prey. They oppressed the poor economically, causing them to fail financially. Especially, they wanted the poor man’s land (Is. 5:8). He specifies several examples of their corrupt practices. The day of **“the new moon”** was a holiday on which men rested and trading was suspended (See Numbers 28:11; II Kings 4:23). The same was true of the weekly Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12-14). Those pillars of the community dutifully observed the holy days but chaffed and fretted because in so doing they were losing so much business. They drew near with their lips but their hearts were far from God (Matt.15:8). **“To set forth wheat”** meant literally to open the granaries for buying and selling (Gen. 41:56).

They were crooked business men. Four examples of their dishonest practices are reported.

1. They made their **ephahs small**. An ephah was a basket for dry measurement holding 5.8 gallons. By using smaller than standard ephahs they got the same money for less goods.
2. They made the **shekel larger**. A shekel was a coin or a measurement of weight. In those days, a customer's precious metal was weighed to determine its value. By using extra heavy counter weights they again defrauded their customers.
3. They used **deceitful balances or scales** that always weighed to the advantage of the merchant. Moses' Law strictly forbade such evil practices. "Thou shalt not have in thy bag diverse weights a great and a small... a perfect and just weight shalt thou have" (Deut. 25:13-16).
4. They sold **the refuse of the wheat**, i.e., the hulls, trash, that which was spoiled and broken pieces that had been sifted out and was normally given to the animals. Those greedy merchants sold the trash by carefully mixing it with the good. Such economic fraud is still a current problem. Governments have to constantly monitor manufacturers and merchants lest they defraud consumers. The news frequently reports those apprehended so doing.

In their greed, after having reduced to poor man to poverty they then would buy him, i.e., place him in servitude. To show how vicious they were, he notes that they would do so for a sum as trifling as a pair of sandals. This of course was done with the collusion of the corrupt courts condemned in 5:10-12.

**"Jehovah, hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? yea, it shall rise up wholly like the River, and it shall be troubled and sink again, like the River of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day"** (8:7-9). **"The excellency of Jacob"** is Jehovah himself (Compare 4:2). This verse poses some difficulty because in other settings **"the excellency of Jacob"** reflects the prosperity and status of Israel (See Nahum 2:2). This can be explained by viewing it as a metonymy where the benefit received stands for the bestower thereof which is Jehovah. God **"will never forget any of their (evil) works."** He is omniscient, knowing all things and forgetting nothing. Every crime against the poor would one day be properly rewarded. This reminds us of Jesus' words that every hair of your heads is numbered and

not even a tiny sparrow will be forgotten by God (Luke 12:6-7). God will not forget abuse of the poor who are made in his image.

Because of their sins of oppression, the land, i.e., their society or nation, will **“tremble”** as in an earthquake; be troubled and swept away like the flooding Nile, and darkened as the sun in an eclipse. All of these phenomena of nature were viewed with great fear by the ancients. Amos’ use of similes and metaphors does not demand a literal earthquake, flood or eclipse. The upheaval of their nation in the coming judgment by Assyria was what he has in mind. To darken the sun is frequently used as a symbol for the violent overthrow of rulers and government (See Joel 2:31; Isaiah 13:9-10; Revelation 6:12-15).

**“And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day”** (8:10). He describes the awful sorrow that will come upon them when the Lord’s judgment comes. Instead of their great and joyous festivals, there will be bitter mourning as at the death of an only son. Other prophets used similar language to describe the sufferings of national judgment by war. (See Isaiah 15:1-3; Ezekiel 7:14-18). **“Lamentations”** are funeral dirges. **Sackcloth** is a coarse cloth like our burlap. It was worn as a sign of great mourning. **Shaving the head and/or beard** was a sign of great sorrow (See Isaiah 3:24). The whole nation would mourn bitterly as a family who lost an only son (See Jeremiah 6:26). Their loss, however, would be their defeat in war; the loss of thousands of casualties in combat and slaughter; the ruining of their cities; the overthrow of their government and the deportation of their people.

**“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst”** (8:11-13). As the most serious and disastrous penalty against Israel, God promises that he will take away from them his faithful prophets and the divine message they conveyed. The results would be a spiritual famine. They had despised God’s prophets and ordered them to keep quiet (Amos 2:12), now God would take away his messengers and his word (Compare Micah 3:7) and they would yearn for and search for it like a starving man searches for food. The same kind of famine later occurred in Judah (Ezek. 7:26). It is an awful judgment when God abandons people.



**“From sea to sea”** means from west to east, from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. We would say, from one end of the land to the other. Even the young in their strength shall not survive without God’s life-giving word (Matt. 4:4). Our modern generation shows great contempt for God’s word as they indulge themselves in sensual pleasures and materialism. But when hardships come, and come they surely will, they will go seeking after a word from God. They may well, by then, find themselves in a spiritual wasteland.

**“They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, As thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, As the way of Beersheba liveth; they shall fall, and never rise up again”** (8:14). **“The sin of Samaria”** refers to the golden calves that the rulers of Samaria had set up at Bethel and Dan (I Kings 12:26-29). At Beersheba, where Abraham had worshiped God, Amos’ generation worshiped idols (See II Kings 23:8; Amos 5:5). For the **“way of Beersheba”** the marginal note has **“the manner of”** which is the clearer meaning. Paul spoke of Christianity as **“this way”** (Acts 22:4). Such swearing was meaningless for their calves and oaths were nothing (**aven**). Furthermore, such oaths violated Deuteronomy 6:13-14. **“Thou shalt fear Jehovah...and him shalt thou serve and shalt swear by his name.”** **“They shall fall and never rise up again”** speaks of the final and complete overthrow of their nation. When Assyria dismantled the Northern Kingdom in 722 and deported her people, the political kingdom of Israel was forever destroyed. Her scattered survivors were absorbed by the Kingdom of Judah. Thus was fulfilled the words of David; **“The wicked shall be turned back into Sheol, Even all the nations that forgot God”** (Ps. 9:17).

### **Israel’s End Foreseen (9:1-4).**

**“And I saw the Lord standing beside the altar: and he said, Smite the capitals, that the thresholds may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them, and I will slay the last of them with the sword: there shall not one of them flee away and there shall not one of them escape”** (9:1). This is the last of the five visions of God’s judgment upon the Kingdom of Northern Israel. In the vision, Amos saw the Lord standing by the altar. The prophet used the name **Adonai** for God which denotes his power and authority. Thus Adonai has the power and authority to judge and destroy a rebellious nation. He does not use the name Jehovah, which means God of the covenant, because Israel had long since despised and broken their covenant with Jehovah.

**The altar**, by which Amos saw the Lord standing, was most likely the one at Bethel where Amos was confronting the people. This is the most natural

meaning. It was the worship center that would shortly be smitten and destroyed. Some reason that since he speaks of altar (singular) it would have to be the one delegated altar at Jerusalem but the citizens of the North had long since rejected Jerusalem's temple for their shrines at Dan and Bethel. Although Solomon's temple would later be destroyed, that would be a judgment on the Southern Kingdom of Judah, not Northern Israel. The vision shows God smiting one particular altar of idolatry. The one stands by metonymy (a part for the whole) for every pagan shrine in the land.

God ordered an unnamed agent to smite the capitals of the temple. Some think he speaks to Amos, but the prophet would not be able to bring down the building. To describe the judgement, God borrowed imagery from previous destructions. (Compare II Samuel 24:15-16 and II Kings 19:35). **“The capitals”** are the ornamental crowns of the great supporting columns of their temple. On the capitals rested the threshold or lintel beams that supported the roof. Amos sees a smashing blow from above that brings down the roof of the temple upon the heads of the pagan worshipers. This is reminiscent of Samson bringing down the temple of Dagon on the Philistine idolaters (Judg. 16:29-30). The actual fulfillment of this vision was when Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser IV and Sargon II brought their Assyrian troops into Israel. They defeated and dismantled the sinful nation. None would escape the threatened judgment. If they survived the destruction of their temple and fled, the avengers God would hunt them down.

**“Though they dig into Sheol, thence shall my hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence, and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and it shall bite them”** (9:2-3). With vivid poetic style, he describes the desperate attempt of the survivors to escape from God's punishment. He uses a double parallel. **Sheol** means literally, “the unseen world, the state or abode of the dead” (**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**). It is frequently used for the grave where the bodies of the dead are deposited and left unseen to those upon the earth. If the fugitives tried to hide in the dark recesses of a cave or an underground chamber, they would not escape the hand of the all-seeing God. **“Though they climb up to heaven,”** a literal impossibility, is explained in the parallel line that follows;

“though they climb up to heaven”

“though they hide.....in the top of Carmel”

Notice the contrast. They could not hide from God in the deepest cave nor on the top of a mountain. Mount Carmel was only 1728 ft. above sea level, but it was covered with a rich growth of trees and shrubs and riddled with over 1000 caves. It was thus an excellent hiding place for one pursued by men, but of no avail when fleeing from God. Hiding in **“the bottom of the sea”** balances with the earlier line about digging into Sheol. In those days, no man could actually hide in the depth of the sea. But should he try to do so, God would not be thwarted. He will command a sea serpent to bite him. These venomous sea serpents, called *hydrophidae*, are common in the warm waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Their bite is deadly. All of these examples of man’s inability to flee from God declare the fact of His omniscience. Nothing is hidden from his sight (Heb. 4:13). David praised the all-seeing God in similar terms in Psalms 139:7-12.

**“And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them; and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good”** (9:4). A fifth attempt by the idolatrous Israelites to escape death is now illustrated. Some might think to meekly surrender to the conquering Assyrians and accept life in captivity. God responds by warning that even in a far distant land he can send his sword to destroy them. Normally, the idea of God’s eyes being upon his people is considered to be a blessing. **“The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous”** (Ps. 34:15). **“The eyes of Jehovah are always upon it”** (the land of Israel) (Deut.11:12). But Amos sees the omniscience of Jehovah as assurance that the wicked will in no way escape his just reward.

**“For the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, is he that toucheth the land and it melteth and all that dwell therein shall mourn; and it shall rise up wholly like the River and shall sink again like the River of Egypt”** (9:5). With two awesome word pictures Amos describes the coming judgment upon Israel. God will touch the nation, and it will melt under his finger as butter before the sun. They will be helpless to resist their destruction. The nation will be in a state of upheaval, churning like the Nile in flood season. It will then sink in the flood with everything of value swept away. The same thought was expressed in (8:8).

**“It is he that buildeth his chambers in the heavens, and hath founded his vault upon the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Jehovah is his name”** (9:6). In verse 5 Amos sets forth God’s irresistible power to destroy the wicked. In verse 6 he speaks of the divine exaltation. He is God whose **“chambers”** are in the heavens. This is rendered **“stories”** in the KJV. It literally means **“stairs.”** The

thought being, that the heavens we see are but the stairs that lead upward to the dwelling place of Jehovah (Laetsch) (Compare Hebrews 4:14 when Christ is said to have “passed through the heavens”). “**His vault**” refers to the sky visible to inhabitants of earth. The ancients looked up into the heavens and described them as the underside of a great cupola or dome, above which God resided. The KJV rendering “**of his troops**” has led to much speculation. It is rendered “his vault” in the ASV and “its foundation” in the NIV. This mighty, transcendent God that Israel had spurned, is the same God who in Noah’s day called for the waters of the sea and then poured out the destructive deluge upon a wicked generation (Gen. 7:4). “**Jehovah is his name.**” The Hebrew YHWH translated Jehovah means the God of “underived existence” (Fairbairn) or the self-existing one. All other things in existence, whether spiritual or material, exist because of His will and power. Jehovah has always existed. He depends upon no one and holds the power to destroy all things created. (Compare Exodus 3:13-15 and Colossians 1:16-17).

### **He Destroys Their Boasting (9:7-10).**

In the following verses the prophet respond to four common boasts of the Israelites Even though they had long ago apostatized from Jehovah, yet they clung to what they believed to be a privileged status with him. “**Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith Jehovah**” (9:7a). They boasted “we are the children of Israel.” They falsely assumed that since God had blessed their father Jacob and promised the land of Canaan to his descendants, they would always be privileged and secure therein. God responded to their faulty theory by telling them that they were no different than the “children of the Ethiopians,” idolatrous Gentiles, whom they despised! The Hebrews boasted that God had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They assumed that they alone were the objects of God’s providential rule in the earth.

“**Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?**” (9:7). God smashes their mistaken idea by informing them that he had also brought the wicked Philistines from Caphtor and the hated Syrians from Kir. Caphtor is thought to be an early name for the island of Crete from whence the Philistines had migrated to Canaan. (See Jeremiah 47:4 and Ezekiel 25:16). The location of Kir, from whence the Syrians migrated, is unknown. In 1:5, Amos predicted the Syrians would be taken captive unto Kir. The history of the world is the migrations of nations. Few lands today are populated by their original stock of people. A good example is the United States, migrating Englishmen and

Europeans took the land from its native inhabitants. Paul reminds us that it is God who determines the appointed seasons and bounds of the habitation of the nations of the earth. (Acts 17:26) In this respect, Israel was no different than other nations.

**“Behold the eyes of Jehovah are upon the sinful kingdom”** (9:8a). They also boasted that “the eyes of the Lord Jehovah were upon them. Their poets and prophets had often used that phrase (See 9:4). The Hebrews assumed His eyes were on them only for good. He corrects their mistaken view by informing them that His eyes are truly on them and what he sees is a sinful nation deserving punishment.

**“And I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; save that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith Jehovah”** (9:8b). The extent of the nation’s judgment is now announced. The political kingdom will be destroyed from off the face of the earth. That was done by Sargon II in 722 B.C. He defeated, dismantled and deported Northern Israel. Jehovah then hastened to add that in the destruction he will save the righteous remnant, even as he saved Noah and his family.

**“For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, like a grain is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least kernel fall upon the earth”** (9:9). The threshed grain is sifted to cleanse it, to save the good wheat and to separate the chaff and trash. Likewise, through the judgment to come upon Israel, God will providentially preserve his righteous remnant (Compare Matthew 3:11-12). The surviving remnant from the North attached themselves to the nation of Judah (II Chronicles 30:10-19, 25).

**“All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, the evil shall not overtake nor meet us”** (9:10). While the righteous will be saved as wheat in the sieve, the wicked will die by the sword of war. Their fourth boast was **“the evil shall not overtake nor meet us.”** How wrong this idea was, was fully realized by those who lived to see the first Assyrian invasion in c.a. 734 B.C.

### **Blessing of Future Days (9:11-15).**

In the final five verses, the prophet offers a glowing ray of hope for a people whose national doom had just been announced. That this passage is **messianic** is indisputable, for James, at the Jerusalem conference, said so and applied it to the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom and the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18). And examination of the entire section (vss 11-15) leaves the

impression that the prophecy is dual in nature. By that we mean, it had both a close and a distant fulfillment. That such dual prophecies are used by God in predicting the future can be seen by considering the great prophecy of II Samuel 7:12-16. In that prophecy, both Solomon, his temple and his kingdom and Christ and his spiritual kingdom (temple) are under consideration. The flag that suggests this conclusion is in (9:14-15); **“I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them....and I will plant them upon their land...”**

**“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this”** (9:11-12). **“In that day,”** i.e., in the day when the fortunes of God’s people are in hopeless disarray, He will act on behalf of his people. This looks back to 9:8-10 and the disastrous judgments promised. **“The tabernacle of David”** will be restored. F. C. Cook notes it is “a word used for a temporary structure of boughs, or the rude hut of soldiers in the field” (See II Samuel 11:11). This speaks of the ruined condition of David’s dynasty and kingdom at the time the prophecy would be fulfilled. Normally, one would speak of the “house of David,” but after the fall of Israel to Assyria and Judah to Babylon and their resulting captivity, it was more like a hut.

When God restored David’s people to their land in 536 B.C., and placed Zerubbabel of the Davidic line, in the governor’s chair, it was only a dim shadow of the kingdom over which David had ruled. Only in Messiah’s kingdom was their prediction fully realized (Acts 2:29-35). The little state of Judah was broken and in ruins when Jesus came to it. It was subject to Rome who had divided the land and set petty rulers over it with no consideration for the house of David.

**“That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this”** (9:12). Edom was kin to Israel, being descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother. Yet the Edomites were Israel’s most bitter enemy. David had subdued the Edomites (II Sam. 8:14) but they regained their freedom by revolting from Jehoram (II Chron. 21:8-10). In the days of Judah’s restoration, John Hyrcanus defeated the Edomites and they were absorbed into the Jewish nation. But Amos looks beyond that event to the day when Edom and all the Gentile “nations “that are called by God’s name are part of Messiah’s spiritual kingdom, the church. They would be identified or called by the name Christian (Acts 11:26). Edom stands representatively for all Gentile nations, for when James cited this verse it was

to prove that Peter was justified in taking the gospel to Cornelius the Roman (Acts 15:13-19). It is noteworthy that James, in referring to Amos, loosely quotes from the Septuagint, hence the variation in the wording.

**“Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them”** (9:13-14). The promise of super abundant crops is to be understood as a restoration of prosperity, not literally. It took Israel’s crops as long to grow and mature as it does ours. This is a renewal of the promise made to the fathers through Moses. “And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full...” (Lev. 26:5). In Messiah’s kingdom these promises are realized in the spiritual blessings we have in Christ (Eph. 1:3; Phil. 4:18-19).

**“The mountains shall drop sweet wine”** is a metonymy where by mountains stand for the vineyards grown upon them. From the vines the sweet wine came. **“The hills shall melt”** is explained by the parallel verses (Joel 3:18). **“and the hills shall flow with milk.”** In this illustration, the hills stand by metonymy for the flocks of goats and herds of cattle that grazed on them and produced the milk.

Through the kindness of Cyrus, king of Persia, the remnant was restored to their land in 536 B.C. They were led by Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. They did rebuild Jerusalem and the wasted cities in the years following, but they were not to stay there forever. Sin would once more be their undoing. **“And I will plant them upon their land and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God”** (9:15). Only in Messiah’s kingdom does this verse find its fulfillment. Of his faithful sheep who follow him, the good shepherd says “no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:29). Those who come to him on his terms he, “will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). The Lord’s church is a spiritual “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).

Amos’ prediction of the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom, which is his church, is solid proof that the church was foreknown and fore-planned by God. It was part of the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:10-11) and not an afterthought as the advocates of premillennialism affirm.

## **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- National sin will result in national judgment. While individuals will stand before the judgment throne of God (Rev. 20:11-12), nations will be judged now!
- Nations and individuals that have received special privileges must assume corresponding responsibilities.
- God is gracious and patient in warning us of judgment (II Pet. 3:9), but he will not keep warning us forever.
- From Amos, we see purpose and meaning in national disasters.
- God is sovereign ruler over all the nations of the earth to make them prosper or to destroy them.
- Social injustice is as intolerable in God's sight as religious corruption.
- Selfish indulgence leaves us deaf to the cries of the poor and oppressed.
- False pride in ones self-sufficiency chokes out God's influence in our lives.
- The most elaborate worship, if insincere, is an insult to God.
- God's spokesmen must never be silenced by the worldly-minded in the church.
- Foolish sinners worship the stars while rebelling against Him who made the objects they adore.
- Worldly men, like Amaziah, cannot conceive of one serving God from any motive other than money (7:12).
- A crooked wall always hates a straight plumb line.
- Justice between men is one of the divine foundation blocks of society.



## **OBADIAH,**

### **THE SERVANT OF THE LORD**

The book of Obadiah is the shortest of the Old Testament. Its single subject is the sin of the nation of Edom and her coming doom.

#### **About the Author**

The book bears the name of its author, Obadiah, the prophet of Jehovah (vs. 1). Thirteen different men of the Old Testament wore this name. The Jewish Talmud identifies the author of the book with Obadiah, King Ahab's servant (I Kings 18:3-5). However, the scanty evidence is not sufficient for such a conclusion. All that we know about the writer is that reflected in his short book. His name means "servant of the Lord." He was a godly, patriotic citizen of the kingdom of Judah who recorded his righteous indignation toward the wicked Edomites. Obadiah strongly believed in the providential rule of God over all kingdoms and the divine justice that would reward sinful nations for their crimes.

#### **The Conflict Between Edom and Israel**

The enmity between these two peoples dates from the birth of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:21-26). The event that triggered the feud was Jacob's obtaining of Esau's birthright by deceit (Gen. 25:27-34; 27:1-45). God considered the Israelites and Edomites brethren. Edomites were not to be abhorred by Israel (Deut.23:7) and Israel was forbidden to take Edom's land (Deut.2:1-8). Edomites could enter the congregation of Israel after three generations (Deut. 23:8). The Edomites, however, were not inclined to show kindness or tolerance toward Israel. Edom's anger tore "perpetually" and he kept his wrath forever (Amos 1:11). During the long trek of the Exodus, they refused the weary Hebrews right of passage over their King's Highway (Num. 20:14-21). Economics was a major cause of strife between the two nations. The border between them, the Arabah, was a major caravan route. Copper ore was found there in abundance.

## About the Nation of Edom

The Edomites occupied the high plains south and east of the Dead Sea. They occupied territory some 100 x 20 miles in size. It was well watered with mountain peaks reaching 5,700 feet above sea level. The name Edom meant "red." It likely referred to the red sandstone rocks of their territory. It is sometimes called "Seir" which is the name of a range of mountains extending north to south in their land. For fortified cities, Edom had Petra (sometimes called Sela), Teman and Bosrah.

Petra was one of the wonders of the ancient world. She was situated in a box canyon with cliffs 700 ft. high. Her single entrance was a mile long corridor which was only a few feet wide. Such natural defenses made her invulnerable. The buildings of Petra were carved into the red sandstone cliffs. They remain to this day. The name "Petra" means "rock." From this hidden fortress the Edomites preyed on passing caravans.

David conquered the Edomites and occupied their land (II Sam. 8:14). Solomon exploited their land and wealth. They rebelled and gained their independence in the days of Ahaz. When the Babylonians attacked Judah, in 586 B. C., Edom joined them against the Hebrews. By the time of Malachi, Edom had been severely beaten (Mal. 1:2-5). The Nabatean Arabs occupied their land in 312 B. C. The Greeks gave their land the name Idumaea. Following their defeat by John Hyrcanus and the Hebrews in 120 B. C., the Idumaeans were forced to convert to Judaism.

In 47 B. C. Julius Caesar, the Roman emperor, appointed Antipater, an Idumaeen, to be procurator in Judea. Herod, son, of Antipater, became king of Judea in 37 B. C. Following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D., the Idumaeans vanished from history. They had joined in the revolt against Rome and were destroyed as a nation.

The Edomites reflected the sinful attributes of Esau, their father. They were a carnal, sensual people who loved their bellies, spoils and revenge. They had no noble ideals or aspirations. The religion of Edom is never mentioned in the Bible. It seems they were totally irreligious.

## About the Book of Obadiah.

**The message was addressed to the Hebrews** who were suffering at the hands of the Edomite aggressors. **The occasion** that prompted the writing is seen in the following verses. Jerusalem had been invaded and plundered and the Edomites had joined in the looting of their neighbors' possessions (vs. 11).

They had expressed a fiendish delight in the evil which their Hebrew brethren were suffering (vs. 12). In addition to the looting, they occupied some of the territory of their weakened neighbors (vs. 13). When the defeated Israelites sought to flee from the advancing troops, the Edomites blocked their escape, captured and sold their victims into slavery (vs. 14).

We cannot determine with certainty the specific historical event that prompted Obadiah to write. Four different invasions of Jerusalem took place over the years. During Rehoboam's reign, Shishank, the Egyptian, took the city in 926 B. C. (I Kings 14:25-26; II Chron. 12:1-12). The Philistines and Arabians ravaged the city at the time of Jehoram's reign (848-841 B.C.) (II Chron. 21:16-17). In 790 B. C. Jehoash of Northern Israel, defeated Amaziah of Judah (II Kings 14:8-14; II Chron. 25:17-24). In 586 B. C., in Zedekiah's day, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and her temple (Jer. 52:12-17). Scholars have been equally divided in assigning the date of the book to 845 B.C. or 586 B.C.

The present author prefers **the date of 845**, during Jehoram's reign. The reasons are as follows: Edom had recently revolted (II Kings 8:20-22; II Chron. 21:8-20). Obadiah does not mention the wholesale deportation of the population as occurred in 586 B. C. Slaves are not said to go east to Babylon, but to Phoenicia and the west (Ob. 20). When other prophets discuss Nebuchadnezzar's taking of the city, they name the enemy and even the king himself. Obadiah does not mention the name of the aggressor. Nor does he say that the city and the temple were totally destroyed as in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. Later prophets were familiar with Obadiah's writing and made use of it. It must therefore have preceded theirs. Amos, who wrote in 760, alludes to Obadiah. (Compare Amos 1:7 and Obadiah 10-14; Amos 9:2 and Obadiah 4; Amos 9:12 and Obadiah 19). **The author's purpose** was not to warn the Edomites, but to announce their doom and thus to comfort Israel.

**Liberal critics** have maligned Obadiah as a "sordid example of petty Jewish nationalism and hatred" (George Adam Smith). From the days of Eichorn, skeptical writers have questioned the unity of the book and sought to identify various sections as coming from different authors. All of these writers seek to evade the predictive message which only the Holy Spirit can provide. For an excellent refutation of these theories, see **An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets** by Hobart Freeman.

### **Some Miscellaneous Facts About Obadiah's Book.**

1. New Testament writers neither quote nor refer to Obadiah's message.

2. The author has no denunciation for Israel nor call for righteousness, only judgments predicted for Edom.
3. Edom typifies all the heathen nations that are hostile to God's kingdom. The judgments promised to Edom are symbolic of God's judgment on all evil nations (See vs.15-16).
4. "The day of Jehovah" (vs. 15) is a day in time when judgments will come upon a nation, after which history will continue.

For background reading on Edom see Amos 1:11-12; Isaiah 34:5-15; 63:1-6; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Joel 3:19; Malachi 1:2-5.

### **Keys that Unlock the Meaning of Obadiah**

The **key verses** are two:

**Vs. 15**, "For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the nations: as thou has done, it shall be done unto thee..."

**Vs. 21**, "...and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's"

The **key thought** is that proud Edom shall be humbled.

The **key concept** is that in his providential governance of the nations, God will bring justice upon a wicked, oppressive nation like Edom.

## **EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT**

### **I. Edom's Fall Predicted (vs. 1-9).**

"**The vision of Obadiah**" (vs. 1a). Two bits of information are couched in this opening phrase: (1). The author is identified and (2). The revelation he received, which he styles "a vision." At first glance we would assume that by this term, he specifies the manner of his reception of God's message. However, "the word vision (*chazon*) is applied to all divine communications made to a seer, whether in the ecstatic or in the ordinary state" (F. C. Cook). Theo Laetsch points out that the term is used of

1. "Visual revelations" ( Dan. 8:1-4);
2. "Oral revelations" seen or perceived by hearing (I Chron. 17:15).
3. The written record of the revelation" (Is. 1:1).

**“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah concerning Edom”** (vs. 1b.). In this phrase the prophet establishes the authority of his message as coming from God rather than from himself. Scripture was not composed by the wisdom and genius of the writers. It was “God’s wisdom...revealed...through the Spirit (I Cor. 2:7-13). “Lord” is from the Hebrew word *adonai* and suggests one who is lord and ruler and possessing authority. It is always used to identify the true God. The name Jehovah, from Yahweh, is the covenant name of God revealed to Moses on Sinai (Ex. 3:14-15). The message is “concerning Edom,” Israel’s hostile and wicked neighbor. See the introductory remarks for an extended identification and discussion of Edom.

**“We have heard tidings from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle”** (vs. 10). This is the heart of his message. The great Jehovah is rallying the nations to make war on proud, evil Edom. The “ambassador” is not identified. A similar phrase is used by Jeremiah regarding God’s judgement on Edom (Jer. 49:14). The thought is that through his providential agents, God is preparing Edom’s judgment (Compare Jeremiah 50:2). This verse reminds us of God’s government over the nations of the earth. He raises up kings and brings them down (Dan. 2:21). Historically, He used one wicked kingdom to punish another and then used still another to destroy it (Is. 10:5-12).

**“Behold, I have made thee small among the nations; thou art greatly despised. The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground?”** (vss. 2-3). Edom was “small” in territory, her land occupying a strip on the eastern side of the Arabah, some 100 miles long by 20 broad. Additionally, she was “small” in the eyes of her neighbors. The parallel structure suggests this as the meaning

“I have made thee small...;  
thou art greatly despised.”

In Hebrew poetry, the second line frequently explains the first. Though they were a proud scoffing people others despised them.

The great underlying sin of Edom was her pride. With nations as with men, pride goeth before destruction (Prov. 16:18). “A man’s (or a nation’s) pride shall bring him low” (Prov. 29:23). Edom’s pride was in her military might and her superb natural defenses. The rugged terrain, the scarcity of water and food sources for invading armies, her renowned fortress cities, Bozra, Sela and Petra all made her feel invulnerable. “Who shall bring us down?” But

her pride had deceived her. She had forgotten or ignored Jehovah, the God of hosts, who could bring her down by a spoken word (Ps. 33:9). His weapons include, “Fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind, fulfilling his word” (Ps. 148:8); angels (Is. 37:36); even the elements fight his battles (Josh. 10:11). The reference to her dwelling in the clefts of the rock may likely refer to her city of Petra, carved into the face of the red sandstone cliffs.

**“Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith Jehovah”** (vs. 4). Edom felt as secure as the eagle who builds her nest on the highest cliff, but God would have no difficulty in ripping her down. Nothing is too hard for the Almighty God (Gen. 18:14).

**“If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night (how art thou cut off!), would they not steal only till they had enough? If grape gatherers came to thee, would they not leave some gleanings? How are the things of Esau searched! How are his hidden treasures sought out!”** (vss. 5-6). These verses paint a vivid picture of how thorough the destruction and looting of Edom would be. Two familiar examples are used: thieves and grape harvesters both were common among the Edomites. They themselves were a robber nation that preyed on the caravans that passed near their strongholds. While thieves would haul away only such as they could carry, nothing would be left when God was through with Edom. Harvesters among the Eastern people left for the poor the gleanings in the fields and vineyards (See Leviticus 19:9-10). When Edom’s judgment comes, every item would be taken. The pillaging would be complete. Note that he uses the name of Esau, father of the Edomites to stand for his descendants (Gen. 36:43).

**“All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee on thy way, even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread lay a snare under thee: there is no understanding in him”** (vs. 7). Edom’s security was further based on the fact that she had made numerous mutual defense alliances with neighboring nations. This added to her false assumption that no enemy could bring her down. The prophet announces that her allies (those at peace with her) had deceived her. To the student of history this appears to be a common occurrence in the diplomatic arena. The idea of “the men of thy confederacy have brought thee on thy way, even to thy border” is that Edom’s diplomats, who would hurry to her neighbors, looking for assistance in the day of disaster, would be turned back, escorted out of the neighboring land to her own border. Some take it to mean that Edom’s refugees would be turned away by their neighbors and supposed allies.

**“They that eat thy bread lay a snare under thee.”** The first three words are supplied by the translators. As stated, it says that people who had been dependent upon Edom for their essentials would turn on her and lay a wound on her when they felt it to be to their advantage. True, this would be an act of utter ingratitude but it was a just reward for treacherous Edom. Omitting, **“they that eat,”** Theo Laetsch suggest that neighboring people who had bought metals and supplies from Edom would use those very goods in making war on Edom, even as Japan used the scrap iron bought from America to arm herself for World War II.

**“There is no understanding in him”** refers to Edom and suggests that in spite of their proverbial shrewdness and savvy in diplomatic matters, the Edomites would not realize what was happening until it was too late to save themselves.

**“Shall I not in that day, saith Jehovah, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one may be cut off from the mount of Esau by slaughter”** (vss. 8-9). The Edomites were renowned for their wise men. Eliphaz, who came to console Job, was from Teman, a city of Edom (Job. 2:11). He was a typical Edomite, proud and haughty. Jeremiah alludes to their wisdom (Jer. 49:7). The wisdom of their statesmen and advisors will fail them, they will perish with the common folk. **“The mount of Esau”** refers to the land of the Edomites, his descendants (Gen.32:3).

**“Thy mighty men O, Teman”** probably refers to her military defenders. This is the common use of the phrase. **“The bows of the mighty men are broken”** (I Sam. 2:4). Jeremiah predicted that when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Edom, **“the heart of the mighty men of Edom at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs”** (Jer. 49:22). Losing heart in the battle, the troops of Edom would be slaughtered. Edom was doomed. Her alliances would fail, her statesmen would not perceive the danger or know how to solve the problems and her troops would not stand the test. Beyond all of that, Jehovah was against her (See Ezekiel 13:8).

### **The Reasons for Edom’s Destruction (vss. 10-14).**

God’s judgements are never without reason. Nations, like individuals, reap what they have sown (Gal. 6:7). **“For the violence done to thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee and thou shalt be cut off forever”** (vs. 10). The Hebrew term for violence means **“every kind of wrongful, hurtful action against another, particularly oppression, cruelty”** (Laetsch). Amos indicted Edom saying, He did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all

pity” (Amos 1:11). The Edomites were uncommonly cruel towards those whose circumstances were adverse. Their guilt was compounded because it was their “brother Jacob” they were oppressing. Jacob, the brother of Esau, stands for his descendants, the people of Israel. God had commanded Israel, “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother” (Deut. 23:7). Obligations are heightened the closer the relationship. Edom would be punished with “shame” i.e., humiliation and total destruction. Judah had suffered a temporary loss and would eventually be restored. Edom’s fate would ultimately be annihilation. The Nabatean Arabs took their territory in 312 B. C. John Hyrcanus subjected them in 120 B. C. and forced them to convert to Judaism. Following the Roman wars in Palestine, the Edomites disappeared from history.

**“In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them” (vs.11).** This verse adds specifics to the general charge of vs. 10. When Jerusalem was attacked and captured, Edom had stood “on the other side” i.e., on the side of the enemy invader. Not only did Edom not assist Judah, her kindred, she was as one of the invaders. The prophet writes as an eyewitness who had seen the evil actions described. Jerusalem’s gates had been taken. Aliens had looted the helpless city. Lots were cast for booty and slaves. Edom participated!

The perennial question has been of which sacking of Jerusalem does the prophet write? For reasons set forth in the introduction, the author opts for the fall of the city that occurred in the reign of Jehoram, c.a. 845 B.C. (See II Chronicles 21:16-17). Theo Laetsch offers an extended discussion favoring this view. F. C. Cook presents the case for the Babylonian destruction.

**“But look not thou on the day of thy brother in the day of his disaster, and rejoice not over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither speak proudly in the day of distress. Enter not into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea look not thou on their affliction in the day of their calamity, neither lay ye hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. And stand thou not in the crossway, to cut off those of his that escape; and deliver not up those of his that remain in the day of distress” (vss. 12-14).** As the prophet, either in vision or in reality, sees the Edomites eager to participate in Judah’s misery, he utters a series of prohibitions forbidding the things she was eager to do.

1. **“Look not”** on Judah’s disaster means look not “with malignant pleasure, to feast one’s eyes with the calamity of another” (E. Henderson).



2. **“Rejoice not”** at Judah’s destruction. Solomon also warned against being glad at another’s calamity (Prov. 17:5). This seems to be a common weakness of humanity.
3. **“Speak not proudly in the day of distress.”** This literally means to make the voice loud with mocking and jeering. We can imagine the Edomites ridiculing the poor Hebrews or cheering the victors.
4. **“Enter not into the gate of my people.”** They are warned against joining in the pillaging and looting of the conquered city. Even in our modern civilized age, looting of the victims of disasters is a major problem. Humanity has not changed much across the centuries.
5. **“Stand thou not in the crossway to cut off those that escape.”** Here they are warned not to block the escape of the survivors. How cruel to turn the fleeing remnant back to face the cruel hands of their conquerors. Basic human kindness was absent from Edom’s heart. This reminds us of an earlier generation of Edomites who would not allow the weary Hebrews of the Exodus to pass over their King’s Highway (Num. 20:14-21).
6. **“Deliver not up those of his that remain.”** Amos tells us that Edom, with the help of the Philistines, had taken large numbers of slaves from God’s people (Amos 1:6).

All of these warnings were spoken to a people who by a common ancestry were kin to Israel. They should have reflected that kinship in sympathy, kindness and assistance. But Edom’s pride caused “his anger (to) tear perpetually” (Amos. 1:11). It is yet seen in the posterity of Edom who hate Israel with a perfect, burning hatred. It is a blood feud that only death cures.

### **The Day of the Lord Will Vindicate Zion and Destroy Edom (vss. 15-21).**

In this final section of his message, the prophet looks to the future and sees three striking events:

1. Edom and all of Israel’s heathen enemies will be judged and destroyed by Jehovah.
2. Israel shall be restored to her home land and possess even the lands of her ancient enemies.
3. Jehovah’s messianic kingdom will be established on Mt. Zion.

**“For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the nations; as thou has done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yea, they shall drink, and swallow down, and shall be as though they had not been”** (vss. 15-16). “The day of Jehovah” is a favorite theme of the prophets. It speaks of a day in time when God renders unto his enemies their just deserts, but at the same time, it is a day when he will save his faithful servants. God’s day of judgment came upon the Jews in 70 A. D. when Titus’ Roman army took Jerusalem and destroyed it. But Jesus comforted his disciples by saying “when these things begin to come to pass, look up...because your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). The day of Jehovah in our text is not specific as to time. Rather it promises divine judgment on every heathen nation. Each of those ancient people have long since experienced that awful day of the Lord. All of the days of divine judgment in human history point to the coming great day of judgment when all men of all nations and generations will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and receive the things done in the body (II Cor. 5:10).

The standard of judgment is declared, **“as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee.”** In the words of Paul, Whatsoever men have sown, that they shall reap (Gal.6:7). Nations will be judged and rewarded in time. Individuals will be judged in eternity. Specifically, Edom would receive judgment in kind for all the viciousness previously described.

Their drinking on God’s holy mountain probably refers to the drunken celebrations of Edom and her heathen friends when Jerusalem had been brought down by her adversaries. Applying the rule, of what they had sown they would reap, he says that all of Israel’s heathen enemies would one day drink the cup of God’s wrath which would result in their demise. “Thou has drunk at the hand of Jehovah the cup of his wrath; thou hast drunken the bowl of the cup of staggering, and drained it” (Is. 51:17). The idea is that of a cup containing a lethal poison. Those who drank it perished. Condemned people were often given the option of drinking the cup of poison rather than a public execution. So Socrates died. That they would “drink and swallow down” is the picture of a thirsty person eagerly gulping down a cup of water, not knowing it was the cup of God’s wrath (Henderson). The cup was in reality destruction by war, the end of all nations.

**“But in Mount Zion there shall be those that escape and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions”** (vs. 17). While Edom and those like her would perish, a remnant of Judah would escape and return to Mount Zion. The concept of the preserved remnant pervades both

testaments (See Isaiah 20:22; Matthew 22:14; Romans 9:27-29). He uses the name “house of Jacob” to keep before his readers the kindred relation of the Hebrews and Edomites. The Hebrews will “possess their possessions” but Esau will be dispossessed.

**“And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it”** (vs. 18). He sees in the distant future a scene of fiery judgment. The nation of Edom he likens to a field of dry stubble; the Hebrews like a flaming torch are tossed into the field and a raging fire soon engulfs it. So complete is the destruction that “there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau.” Notice too that he foresees the two houses, the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms of the Hebrews again united. This was realized in their return from Babylonian captivity (Compare Isaiah 11:11-14). This destruction of Edom by restored Israel commenced with the troops of Judas Maccabeus who in c.a. 185 B.C. defeated them, slaying 20,000 Edomite warriors (I Macc. 5:3, 65; II Macc. 10:15-23) Some fifty years later, John Hyrcanus again subdued them and forced them to undergo circumcision and become subject to the Mosaic system (**Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews**, book 13, 9, 1). The prophet’s word should be taken with full assurance **“for Jehovah hath spoken it.”**

**“And they of the South shall possess the mount of Esau, and they of the lowland the Philistines; and they shall possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria; and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captives of this host of the children of Israel, that are among the Canaanites, shall possess even unto Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, that are in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the South”** (vss. 19-20). In these lines, Obadiah paints a glowing picture of that future glorious day when restored Israel will blossom as a nation and occupy not only their traditional land, but also that of their hostile neighbors. The **“South”** refers to the southern portion of Judah known as the Negev. He predicts that the Hebrews would one day take Esau’s territory. The **“lowland”** is that part of Palestine known as the **“Shephelah,”** i.e., the coastal plains and foothills. Those Hebrews would take the land formerly occupied by the Philistines who evidently perished at the hands of the Babylonians. They had disappeared by 536 B. C., the time of Israel’s return from captivity. The fields of Ephraim and Samaria had been the heartland of the breakaway Northern Kingdom of Israel. In the future they would once again be a united nation, led by Judah.

Benjamin had remained loyal to Judah when Jereboam rent the kingdom. His land space was small, but in the coming years the prophet saw Benjamin's people expanding east of the Jordan into Gilead. Jewish captives, scattered among their Canaanite neighbors will not only be freed in coming years, but they will take the lands of their captives as far north as Zarephath, a small town nine miles north of Tyre on the Phoenician coast. In the New Testament it is called Sarepta (Luke 4:26 KJV). Joel speaks of the Phoenicians taking Hebrew slaves (Joel 3:4-6). Captives from Sepharad will possess cities in the South (Negev). The identity of Sepharad is unknown. In the context, it obviously is a distant place of captivity from which the Hebrews will one day return to claim their homeland. We should not expect to find this prediction fulfilled in minute detail. What he is saying is, that the scattered Hebrew captives would come home and claim their land. Their enemies, such as Edom, Philistia, Phoenicia and the rebellious Northern Kingdom of Israel, would all perish. Such happened as Obadiah predicted.

**“And saviors shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau, and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's”** (vs. 21). The “saviors” refer to Hebrew leaders whom God would raise up to lead the remnant back to claim their land and secure their place in it. These would include such men as Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and the Maccabean brothers who delivered the nation from their oppressors. The judges were described as men who saved the nation (Judg. 21:16, 39, etc.). These heaven-sent judges would come to “Mount Zion” the place of God's temple. The judgment against Esau would be her destruction (See I Samuel 3:13 and Exodus 12:12). **“And the kingdom shall be Jehovah's”** This looks forward to Messiah's day when Jehovah's reign will extend to every creature in all the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:20-22).

In view of other prophecies regarding the future of Israel and Edom, most conservative scholars judge the last verse to have Messianic implication. In the book of Numbers 24:17-18, Baalam, the errant prophet, said, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, And a scepter shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite through the corner of Moab...And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession, who were his enemies...And out of Jacob shall one have dominion...”

This passage is generally conceded to be Messianic. It ties the one whose star will arise from Jacob to his having sovereignty over Edom.

Amos spoke of a coming day when God would raise up the fallen tabernacle of David. “That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all nations that are called by my name” (Amos 9:11-12). At the Conference at Jerusalem,

James cites Amos' words and applies them to the gospel age in which the message of Christ is being preached to the Gentile nations (Acts 15:13-17). Thus while Obadiah predicts the utter ruin of Edom as a nation, the promise of a place in Messiah's kingdom is made to them and all Gentile peoples who will hearken to the Lord.

### **LESSONS TO REMEMBER:**

- Human defenses are useless when God moves against a nation.
- God demands brotherly love and compassion of all men and all nations.
- Ridiculing a person reveals a lack of brother love.
- It is criminal to rejoice in the calamity and misfortune of another, even if he is an enemy.
- Obadiah's message is a rebuke to those who prefer not to become involved in the problems of other people.
- "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).
- God will reveal his righteous purposes in due time.
- Eternal justice will ultimately prevail in the world.
- Profane people cannot hope to find favor at the hand of a God whom they have never loved nor respected.
- The kingdom shall be Jehovah's. God will one day claim his own!
- As Edom had treacherously dealt with his brother Judah, so would her allies deal with her. Reaping what we have sown is an invariable law of God's world (Gal.6:7).
- Obadiah's direful prophecy concerning Edom was fulfilled: "For violence done to thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever" (vs. 10).



## **JONAH,**

### **THE RUNAWAY PROPHET**

Perhaps the best known of all the prophets is Jonah, the man swallowed by the fish. Proverbs, songs, and stories have popularized Jonah and made his name a common household word. Wherever the Scriptures have gone men know about Jonah.

#### **About the Man**

Jonah preached during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Northern Israel. Jeroboam's reign began in 782 B.C. The prophet's home was in Gath-hepher in the district of Zebulun in Northern Israel (II Kings 14:25). This was just a few miles northeast of present day Nazareth. The record tells us his father was Amittai (1:1). Thus he would have been known as Jonah ben Amittai. An unproved Jewish legend says he was the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah restored to life (Compare I Kings 17:17-24). His name, "Jonah," meant "dove" in the Hebrew; a name strangely inappropriate for a man of his hostile temperament.

As a preacher, Jonah was powerful and successful, especially in bringing men to repentance. But his greatness as a preacher was marred by his stubborn, strong will and his refusal to yield even to God. He was a fierce patriot who would rather die than be found lending aid or comfort to the enemies of his nation. In him we see revealed the worst degree of narrow Jewish exclusivism towards Gentiles.

Jonah was not the only preacher in Israel in that day. Amos and Hosea both served along with him in the Northern Kingdom, while Isaiah and Micah served in the South a little later.

There were several unique things about Jonah. He was the only one of the minor prophets who preached to a foreign nation on foreign soil. Likewise he was the

only Old Testament personage reported to have traveled the Mediterranean. Of the twelve minor prophets he alone was involved in the miraculous in a substantial way. He was the only Old Testament character to which the Lord Jesus likened himself (Matt. 12:38-41). Jonah has the distinction of being the only preacher in recorded history who hoped he would fail.

### **The Times**

The eighth century B. C. was a perilous time for the little nations of the Middle East. Mighty Assyria was the aggressor nation of day. She was an expansionist nation, willing to use aggression against weaker nations in order to expand her boundaries. Her warrior kings were casting lustful eyes toward the strategic land of Israel. Following the death of Jeroboam II, King Menahem and the Israelites became tributaries to Pul, King of Assyria (II Kings 15:19).

The Assyrians used terror to intimidate and gain control over their neighbors. The program of King Ashur-nasir-pal II was typical. "His usual procedure after the capture of a hostile city was to burn it, and then to mutilate all the grown male prisoners by cutting off their hands and ears and putting out their eyes; after which they were piled in a great heap to perish in torture from sun, flies, their wounds and suffocation; the children both boys and girls, were all burned alive at the stake and the chief (ruler) was carried off to Assyria to be flayed (skinned ) alive for the king's delectation" (**Hall's Ancient History of the Near East**, p 445).

### **Nineveh**

This great city was situated on the Tigris River, 250 miles north of Babylon, some 500 miles east of Jonah's home. She was highly fortified with five walls and three moats surrounding her. Her chief wall was 100 feet high with the top broad enough for four chariots to race around abreast. Her administrative district is thought to have been between 30 and 60 miles in diameter. Some 216 square miles were enclosed within her walls. The population in Jonah's day is estimated to have been 600-650,000. This is based on the fact that there were 123,000 who could not discern their right hand from their left (Jonah 4:11). The center piece of the city was a grand temple built as a pyramid. Her library was said to contain some 10,000 tablets in 860 B. C.

King Ada-Nirari III ruled Nineveh from 810-783 B.C. The Urartu nation threatened Nineveh in Jonah's day. National repentance helped them survive the Urartu threat but soon they reverted to their wicked ways and in 612 A. D. God delivered the mistress of the world into the hands of Babylonians, Medes,



and Scythians. So great was her overthrow that three hundred years later Alexander's Macedonian troops searched for but could not find a trace of her ruins. In fact some skeptical historians doubted there had ever been an actual Nineveh until archeologists unearthed her ruins in the nineteenth century. Today, thanks to their labors, we know a great deal about this illustrious city. No trace however of Jonah's work has been found in the Assyrian record.

### **About the Book**

The author is not named. It is written from the view of a third person about Jonah's trials and labors. Ancient Jewish tradition ascribed it to Jonah himself, as do most contemporary conservative scholars. It was likely written following his experience, thus the date would be somewhere between 780-750 B.C. Liberal scholars prefer to date it 430-400 B.C.

### **Purposes**

At least three purposes are easily discerned in studying Jonah.

1. It declares God's great love for all men; Gentiles as well as Hebrews, and his desire that all be saved.
2. It illustrates God's providential concern for all nations of the world, while rebuking the narrow intolerance of the Hebrews who thought God only cared for them.
3. From Jesus we learn that it typified his coming and that he, like Jonah, would spend three days and nights in the tomb for the benefit of mankind (Matt. 12:40-41).

### **Jonah and the New Testament**

The book has no specific Messianic promise. However, the prophet's experience with the fish was typical of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (Matt. 12:40). The repentance of the Ninevites is cited as a condemnation of those who do not repent at the call of Christ (Matt. 12:41). The proud Pharisees, in rejecting Jesus, because of his Galilean background, overlooked the fact that Jonah had also come from Galilee (John 7:52).

### **Interesting Facts About the Book**

Of the Minor Prophets, only Jonah is written in narrative form. It contains no specific predictive lessons about Israel's future or Messiah's kingdom.

Jonah's powerful sermon that brought the world's mightiest nation to her knees is recorded in only eight words. Rather than a history of the prophet and his ministry, this book should be styled a spiritual biography. The Jews read Jonah in their synagogues annually on the Day of Atonement.

### **Jonah and the Liberal Scholars**

The historical truth and factuality of the book of Jonah was never questioned in Jewish rabbinic tradition. Even Philo of Alexandria, the great allegorist, treated it as factual. It's no secret that modern liberal scholarship uniformly denies the miraculous story of Jonah. We should be reminded that "the denials of the book's historicity was in the first place the results of the dominant rationalistic view of the world, in which there was no room for miracles or for divine interference in things physical" (H. L. Ellison). The testimony of Jesus in Matthew 12:40-41 fully satisfies us as to the factuality of Jonah's record. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Those wishing to see a good defense of Jonah's record should see Gleason Archer's **Survey of Old Testament Introduction**. Jonah has rightly been called "the testbook of the Bible." It challenges our faith and our response reveals our attitude toward God. Whether one can believe the record of Jonah with its miracles depends on whether he spells the name of his God with a large or a small "g"!

### **Five Approaches to Interpretation**

Perhaps here would be the best time to notice the varied attempts of men to explain the book.

**Fictional.** Some liberals view it as simply a religious novel, thus none of the strange events should be considered as actual history.

**Parabolic.** Others understand the book to be an imaginary story to illustrate a spiritual lesson to the Jews. Typical of this view, would be the approach that sees Jonah as the Jewish nation, the Babylonian Captivity as the fish's belly, the restoration as the prophet's expulsion, the mission to Nineveh as the Jews' mission to the Gentile world.

**Symbolic.** In this approach no specific application is offered. Each interpreter is left free to assert his own application so long as it rejects the historicity of the story.

**Mythical.** Some liberals have treated Jonah's story just as we would the myths of the Greeks and Romans.

**Historical.** With faithful believers over the ages, we accept Jonah as a historical record of what actually happened to the prophet. Since Jesus put his stamp of approval on this understanding we are on safe ground.

### **Supernatural Events in Jonah**

The average person tends to think only of the miracle of the fish swallowing Jonah, but this is only one of several divine acts in the record. All of the following were the result of God's action:

1. The sudden storm that threatened the ship wherein the prophet was (1:4).
2. The lot which identified Jonah as the cause of their misery (1:7).
3. The immediate stilling of the storm when Jonah was cast overboard (1:15).
4. The great fish which swallowed Jonah (1:17).
5. The prophet's preservation in the fish's belly (2: 17)
6. The expelling of Jonah on the coast rather than in the depths of the sea (2:10).
7. The vine that grew up over night to shade Jonah (4:6).
8. The worm that destroyed the vine (4:6).
9. The sultry east wind that tormented the prophet (4:8).

### **The Fish that Swallowed Jonah**

The Hebrew word is *dag*; the Greek is *ketos*. The meaning is, a monster of undefined fish-species. Our English translators gave us the word "whale" probably because it was the largest creature of the sea they knew to be capable of swallowing a man. Skeptics have ridiculed Jonah's story as a "fish tale." The facts show that such an event could easily happen. The great white shark inhabits the Mediterranean. This creature grows up to 70 feet in length and up to 50,000 lbs. in weight. Cases have been documented of these sharks with throats 12 feet wide. Specimens have been taken with men, horses, sea-calves and reindeer in their stomachs, swallowed whole. A white shark was taken off of Knight's Key in Florida in 1912. It weighted 30,000 lbs. and was 45 feet

long. In its stomach was a 1500 lb. black-fish. This monster was displayed by the Smithsonian Institute.

James Bartly fell overboard and was swallowed by a large sperm whale in 1891, near the Falkland Islands. The whaling ship, Star of the East, captured the whale the following day. Bartly was found alive and fully recovered. The story was carefully researched and verified by M. deParville, scientific editor of the Journal des Debats, Paris, France.

A white shark swallowed a man in the English Channel. Forty-eight hours later the shark was killed and the man found unconscious but alive. Harry Rimmer reports an interview with the victim (See **Harmony of Science and Scripture** by Rimmer p. 188-189).

Why should we doubt God's ability to prepare a sea-monster capable of swallowing and accommodating a man for three days. Even men have made sea monsters able to host 125 or more men for up to 90 days beneath the seas and then to deliver them alive on dry ground. We call them submarines!

### **Exposition**

As we study this short record of Jonah, the Runaway Prophet, we will see him:

Running away from God in chapter 1;

Running back to God in chapter 2;

Running with God in chapter 3 and;

Running ahead of God in chapter 4.

### **Chapter I - Running Away From God.**

The prophet heard God say “**Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me**” (1:2). He responded by going down to Joppa and booking passage on a ship bound for Tarshish, hoping to flee “**from the presence of Jehovah**” (1:3). Nineveh was 500 miles east of Galilee. Tarshish, in Spain, was at the opposite end of his world, some 2,000 miles away.

Running away from an omnipresent God is an impossible task. Two hundred years earlier David had written”

“Whether shall I go from the Spirit?  
Or whether shall I flee from they presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven thou are there:  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou art there.  
If I take the wings of morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
Even there shall thy hand lead me.....” (Ps. 139:7-9).

It is not unusual for the man who runs away from God to run into a storm. And so: **“Jehovah sent out a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest so that the ship was like to be broken”** (1:4). How can one resist the mighty Jehovah “who maketh the winds his messengers” (Ps. 108:4) and when “Stormy winds” fulfill his word (Ps. 148:8).

So great was the danger that the heathen **“mariners were afraid and cried everyone to his god”** (1:5). But Jonah had repudiated his claim on his God. The poor pagans had to urge the Hebrew prophet to call on his God for salvation (1:6). How embarrassing!

As was common in those days, they cast lots hoping to determine who was to blame for their distress. **“And the lot fell on Jonah”** (1:7). Solomon had noted that “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing there-of is of Jehovah” (Prov. 16:33).

The fear-stricken sailors began to press their passenger, tell us **“For whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou?”** (1:8). Red-faced and humiliated, the derelict man of God confessed in muffled tones: **“I am a Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land”** (1:9). To this they replied, **“What is this that thou hast done?”** (1:10).

When they asked what would he advise for their preservation, he thought of only one thing: **“Take me up and cast me into the sea”** (1:12). With his misconception of God as a stern Lawgiver and Judge who wanted all sinners destroyed, what else could he hope for himself?

The heathen mariners were more humane than God’s prophet. Rather than sacrifice Jonah to the angry sea, **“the men rowed hard to get them back to the land”** (1:13). He would have let them perish in God’s wrath just as he would allow the Ninevites to be destroyed. They risked their lives and

labored mightily to save their Hebrew passenger. Finally it was obvious that they could not win against the elements and no option was left but to dump the offending prophet. Even then, **“they cried unto Jehovah, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood”** (1:14).

To their amazement **“ the sea ceased from its raging.”** The trembling sailors **“offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah and made vows”** (1:16). It is remarkable that these benighted heathen showed more respect and reverence for the Lord than did his own prophet. This is surely one of the great lessons of Jonah, that honest men will worship Jehovah if only his children will share their knowledge with them!

**“And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights”** (1:17). Having already discussed the possibility of there being a fish of such size as to swallow down a man whole, we will only observe that the God who **“created the great sea-monster”** (Gen. 1:21), would surely have no difficulty in appointing one of them to house Jonah for three days. If you spell your God’s name with a capital **“G”** you will have no problem with this fact. However, if you spell yours with a small case **“g,”** I can understand your problem.

## **Chapter II - Running to God.**

When the prophet came to his senses he was in an awful situation. It was totally dark, hot and steamy. The air was foul with contents of the fish’s stomach. Surely he was obsessed with thoughts of death. How could he escape such a chamber? There was nothing to do but pray. And pray he did and that mightily. As never before, he saw his undone condition and he prayed for all he was worth. **“Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish’s belly... When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah...”** (2:1,7). No only did he pray for forgiveness and deliverance, he made a sacred vow to obey God in whatever he asked (1:9).

The key of chapter two is **“Salvation is of Jehovah”** (2:9). Jonah knew that his only hope of salvation was God’s intervention on his behalf. And slowly it began to dawn on him that the same merciful God who might be moved to save a disobedient Hebrew prophet just might be willing to save a repentant Nineveh.

**“And Jehovah spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land”** (2:10). I imagine the poor fellow lying there on the beach the slime of the fish’s belly covering him, the water lapping about him. He was totally

exhausted from his harrowing experience. Yet he was so thankful to be alive that he was ready to run in obedience to any command from the Lord.

### **Chapter III, The Prophet Running With God.**

**“And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying, arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (3:1-2).** It was the same voice he had heard before but this time the prophet saw things from a different perspective. **“So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah” (3:3).** No more running away, God is not to be trifled with. He must be obeyed.

#### **The Sermon that Saved a Nation.**

**“And Jonah.....cried and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4).** We have here only a summary of Jonah’s great lesson but the response of the people demonstrates how effective it was. He spoke of the great Jehovah against whom they had sinned - for they “believed God” as a result of it (3:5). He spoke of judgment for sin for he warned “Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4) He preached repentance “for they repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Matt. 12:41).

**“And the people of Nineveh believed God and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the king.... laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation.....saying, let neither man nor beast, herd, nor flock taste anything’ .... and let them cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil ways, and from the violence that is in his hands, who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away his fierce anger, that we perish not” (3:5-9).**

Oh the power of the word of God, boldly proclaimed by a faithful preacher! Like Micah he was “full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment, and of might,” to declare unto Assyria his transgression, and to Nineveh his sin (Micah 3:8). Then as now, “it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching that saved them that believe” (I Cor. 1:21). How many cities could be saved in our day if we had Jonahs to go and preach God’s message unto them. How many millions of precious souls would gladly heed the Master’s call if they could but hear it. “What the world needs most” is not “love sweet love,” but God’s sweet truth faithfully proclaimed from every house top and on every corner. The tragedy of our age is that many of the sermons preached from our pulpits have absolutely nothing to do with the

salvation of man. As useful as lessons on social graces, friendship, parenting and self-esteem may be, they will not snatch even one soul from the fires of hell (Jude 23) only the gospel of salvation will do that. Never was there a greater need to hear it than today!

**“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not”** (3:10). All of God’s warnings of judgment are conditional. Through Jeremiah he said; “At what instant shall I speak concerning a nation...if that nation... turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them” (Jer. 18:7-8). This tells us there is hope for our nation’s future. If the people can be brought to repentance, God will yet spare us.

#### **Chapter IV - Running Ahead of God.**

This is surely one of the strangest chapters in the Bible. Jonah is the only preacher in recorded history who wanted to fail! When he saw the people contrite and penitent and when he knew God’s plan to forgive and spare them, **“it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry”** (4:1). Finally it all came out. He didn’t want the Ninevites to be saved. He wanted them destroyed one and all! They were his nations’ chief enemy. How could he face the folks back home if he had been the instrument to preserve the cursed Ninevites. Oh the shame and humiliation it would bring him.

**“O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live”** (4:3). Simply said, he would rather be dead than to face his fellow Hebrews under these circumstances.

**“Then Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city”** (4:5). No doubt he was hoping that God would change his mind and turn loose his fury on them.

#### **The Episode of the Vine.**

Nineveh sat on the edge of the desert. Irrigation from the rivers made her habitable. The hot burning sun slowly baked the stubborn prophet, making his life miserable. **“And Jehovah God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to deliver him from his evil case”** (4:6). We can imagine the joy Jonah felt as the leafy vine spread its refreshing shadow over him. Thank God for gourd vines, he no doubt prayed.



**“But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered” (4:7).** Just when he was getting a little relief, the sorry thing died on him! We can see his disgust. **“And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die” (4:8).** He was angry, frustrated and upset about the loss of his gourd vine. Never mind the hundreds of thousands of Ninevites who were there before his eyes; let them perish but not his vine! As the worm ate the heart of the vine, so selfishness ate at the heart of Jonah. While we stand amazed at his ruthless selfishness and calloused indifference, we should look at ourselves in the mirror of God’s word. A world of nearly eight billion souls is marching a straight path to judgment and we fret about our gourd vines, our houses, our careers, our cars, our entertainment and our toys.

**“And Jehovah said, Thou hast regard for the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it to grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night; and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” (4:10-11).** I can see the pouting prophet melting with burning shame under the divine rebuke. How wrong he had been. How narrow was his view of God’s grace. How selfish his thoughts. I like to think that he hung his head and cried out, “God, be thou merciful to me a sinner” (Luke. 18:13).

## **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- Men have looked so long and hard at the great fish of Jonah that they have failed to see the God who made the fish and the purpose of the book.
- Jonah learned that it is impossible to run away from God.
- The path of self-will always leads to disaster.
- It is tragic to face the storms of life without God.
- We see the necessity of obedience to God’s commands, no matter how distasteful.
- No place is so remote or desolate that it cannot be made a house of prayer by a praying saint.
- God had sent numerous prophets to the Hebrews yet they had not repented. He sent one prophet to the heathen Ninevites and they repented en masse.
- Jonah’s experience impressed upon Israel the fact that God’s blessings were not for them alone; they were to be shared with all nations.

- We see in this record the evil and danger of a false, narrow patriotism such as possessed Jonah. Such bigotry towards other nations has always been contrary to God's will.
- No man can be a true herald of God's righteousness who is not also a herald of his mercy. Even today, too many preachers are like Jonah, in that they are afraid of God's grace.
- The penitent sinner will condemn the nominal professor of Christianity. "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41).
- We learn that God's threats are conditional. If we will repent, he will forgive.

### **Conclusion**

Having surveyed this remarkable book we can agree with Charles Reade that "it is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass."

## MICAH: THE PROPHET OF THE POOR

From the misty past, powerful voices are yet heard, ringing out God's message to Israel, his chosen people. Standing tall among those ancient prophets is Micah the Morashtite.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

His name is a shortened form of Micaiah and means "who is likened unto Jehovah?" All we know of this faithful preacher is recorded in his book. That his father's name is unmentioned, leads us to assume that he was of humble parentage. Micah's home was Moresheth near Gath, the old Philistine city. It was a rural farming village some 22 miles from Jerusalem, in the Shephelah hills near the plain of Sharon. It was a fertile region producing abundant crops. Wild flowers and olive trees dotted the landscape.

### THE BACKGROUND OF HIS WORK

Micah prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). It was a dark and dreary time for the little kingdoms of Israel and Judah and their neighbors. The last 50 years of the eighth century B. C., mighty Assyria dominated their world. In 734 B.C. Syria and Northern Israel conspired to overthrow Ahaz, king of Judah. Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help and she responded by capturing Galilee and Gilead, and deporting large numbers of their citizens. In 722 B.C. Samaria, the last bastion of the North, fell to Shalmanezar of Assyria. Judah was placed under tribute. This heavy tribute tax gave the greedy landlords an excuse to oppress the poor, even to confiscate their property and possessions. Widows and orphans were evicted from their homes.

Teachers of the law abused their positions, nobles fleeced the poor, judges accepted bribes prophets and priests flattered the wealthy for their dole. Lust for money prevailed in every place. Materialism had rooted out virtually every

trace of morality and spirituality. Under Hezekiah, Jerusalem was a hot bed of intrigue and faction. Some urged alliance with Egypt while others argued for submission to Assyria.

In 711, Ashdod, under King Yaman, led a revolt against Assyria. Judah, Moab and Edom, looking to Egypt for help, joined in refusing to pay tribute. Sargon inflicted severe penalties on the offenders. Fortunately, Jerusalem was spared.

In 701, Hezekiah of Judah, was lured into a similar revolt. Sennacherib and his Assyrian hordes swept through Judah. The fortress city of Lachish near Micah's home was captured. Jerusalem was laid under siege and saved only by an act of God when an angel smote 185,000 Assyrians in a night.

Micah began his work prior to Samaria's fall in 722 (1:5) and continued on into Hezekiah's reign (Jer. 26:18). He was a man of the country, preaching a message his fellow rural folk understood. He championed the cause of the poor who were oppressed by the rich and powerful. He was a true patriot who loved his homeland enough to condemn its wrongs.

### **HIS CONTEMPORARIES.**

Isaiah and Micah preached in Judah as Hosea worked in the North. While Isaiah, the aristocrat, served in the king's court, Micah, the peasant, preached in the country. Micah is thought to have been younger than the other two prophets. The last half of the eighth century B.C. has been called the golden age of Hebrew prophecy.

### **HIS PREACHING.**

From Micah's writing, we see a man of fire and power, good judgment and a tender heart. He was daring, with strong convictions, never straying from his duty to God. His source of power was revealed when he said, **"I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression...."** (3:8). No other prophet was so blunt and straight-forward in condemning the social evils of his generation. W. J. Moulton writes, "In none of the prophets does the fire of indignation against social wrong-doing burn more fiercely." His message was religious and moral rather than political. It was that message, rather than his family or social status, that wrote Micah's name in history. Like Amos, he had a passion for social justice, but he also had a tender heart of compassion as did Hosea.

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Micah spoke to the problems of both the northern and southern kingdoms as they were in the years between 735 and 700 B.C. As did many of the prophets, he wrote in a poetic style. He expressed himself with “vividness and emphasis, lightening flashes of indignation at social wrongs, rapid transitions from threatening to mercy, vehement emotions and sympathetic tenderness.....” (George Robinson). His use of the Hebrew language was of the highest quality, yet simple as would be expected of a peasant of his day. He loved to use “puns” in his preaching, playing on the sounds and meanings of words. His book is evidently a summation of his many spoken sermons. Micah’s message helped to save Jeremiah’s life some 120 years later when the Jewish leaders noted that he too had predicted Jerusalem’s overthrow (Jer. 26:1-19). This, by the way, is the only mention we find of Micah outside his book.

Micah left for us two vivid messianic prophecies. These will be noticed in detail as we examine the text. Here we simply list them:

1. Messiah’s birthplace (5:2-5).
2. The nature and extent of his reign (4:1-5).

### **HIS MESSAGE AND PURPOSE.**

The prophet’s message was intended especially for the cities of Israel and Judah. He stressed that true faith necessarily produces social equity, justice and practical holiness according to God’s righteous standard. He insisted that God hates injustice and empty ritualism but he also delights in pardoning the penitent.

Five purposes are discernable in his message:

1. He wrote to establish the reasons for God’s complaint against the two nations and to announce their certain and sure punishment if needed changes were not made.
2. He was striving to bring both Israel and Judah to repentance, thus to help them avoid national disaster.
3. He wished to demonstrate the holiness of Jehovah and the righteousness of his rule.
4. He intended to encourage the faithful among the Hebrews to look for future deliverance and blessings.
5. He announced the salvation and kingdom yet to come when their glorious Messiah would appear.

## **SOME MISCELLANEOUS FACTS ABOUT MICAH.**

Micah was the first prophet to predict Jerusalem's fall (3:12). He was also the first to announce the birthplace of Messiah (5:2). His great summary of true religion: "Do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with thy God" (6:8), is engraved on the wall of the Library of Congress in Washington. The modern reader who knows little of the geography of Palestine and the history of Micah's day will find his book very difficult to understand.

### **HOW SCHOLARS HAVE ASSESSED HIS BOOK.**

Dean Stanley wrote: "It contains one of the most sublime and impassioned declarations of spiritual religion (of) the Old Testament."

Dr. A. Pierson said of (7:18-19): "A little poem of twelve lines in the Hebrew.... one of the most exquisite things to be found in the entire Old Testament, and would alone be sufficient to prove that this Bible is the word of God, for there is nothing like it in all the literature of men."

John Paterson wrote: "This book was not written with ink but with the lifeblood of the prophet."

### **AN EXPOSITION**

Micah's book contains three sermons, each beginning with the expression "Hear" (1:2 , 3:1; 6:1). To comprehend him, we must visualize the rustic, country preacher boldly confronting the moral problems that plagued his people. Among those problems were:

1. Exploitation and oppression of the poor (2:2, 8, 9).
2. Unscrupulous use of power (3:10).
3. Lack of integrity (7:2-6).
4. Contempt for true religion (3:5-8).
5. Corruption of the religious teachers (3:5-11).
6. Greed and corruption in every level of public leadership (7:3).

### **Judgments on Samaria and Jerusalem (1:1 - 2:13).**

**"The word of Jehovah that came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning**

**Samaria and Jerusalem” (1:1).** In these few words the prophet tell us the **origin of his message** (it was from Jehovah); the **date of it deliverance** (i.e., the last half of the seventh century); and **object of his message**, Samaria and Jerusalem.

His first sermon declares God’s judgments upon the capital cities of the two sinful kingdoms. He pictures God as judge and the people of Samaria and Jerusalem summoned to stand before him 1:2-4). **“Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord Jehovah be witness against you... behold Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be melted under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, that are poured down a steep place. (1:2-4).** He pictures the Creator coming down to inspect and to judge those of his creatures who are in rebellion to Him. So great is his power and the purifying flames of His judgment that the very elements give way before Him. Of course this language is highly symbolic and not to be taken literally.

**“For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel” (1:5a).** First, he addresses the sins of the Northern Kingdom whom he identifies by the use of Jacob and Israel.

Like a judge reading the indictment, he cites the crimes of which they are guilty. **“What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?” (1:5b).** Their sins have emanated from the seats of political and civic power. Samaria was the capital city of the North and Jerusalem of the South. Corruption in their governments had trickled down to common folks in the villages.

God’s promise of justice and judgment is severe. **“Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as places for planting vineyards; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will uncover the foundations thereof” (1:6).** Samaria will be overthrown and utterly destroyed. A day will come when farmers will plant their crops where the proud city once stood.

**“And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces and all her hires shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I lay desolate; for the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return” (1:7).** In this verse he further identifies the particular sin that had provoked Jehovah. It was their idolatry. Israel had prostituted herself to her idols in hope of material gain. God calls it **“the hire of a harlot.”** Now all

her wealth, and even her idols, will be carted away and dedicated to the idol gods of Assyria.

**“For this will I lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals and a lamentation like the ostriches”** (1:8). The prophet mourns, for he sees that same heavy hand of judgment moving across Judah, even **“unto the gate of ....Jerusalem.”** Many recoil at the idea of Micah going “stripped and naked” as a demonstration of his grief for the nation. We find a similar statement in Isaiah. “Jehovah spake by Isaiah...Go, and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put thy shoe from off they foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot...so shall the king of Assyria lead away the captives...naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered...” (Is. 20:2-4).

**“For her wounds are incurable; for it is come even unto Judah; it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem”** (1:9). The same idolatry that had been the ruin of Samaria and the Northern kingdom had found its way into the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It had taken root even in the holy city of Jerusalem where Jehovah’s temple stood. The coming judgment would likewise reach even unto Jerusalem. The prophet could see the suffering the invading Assyrians would inflict upon his homeland.

Chapter one, verses 10-16, contain a vivid poetic description of the suffering and sorrow the South would experience. It is so composed of “puns” that our English translations leave it totally obscure. Fredrick Farrar captures it for us in all its vividness:

“In (Gath) Tell-town, tell it not;

In (Akko) Weep-town, weep not!

In (Beth-le-aphrah) Dust-town, roll thyself in dust.

Pass by, thou inhabitress of (Shaphir) Fair-town, in nakedness and shame!

The citizens of (Zaanan) March-town, marched not forth.

The mourning of (Bethazel) Neighbor-town, taketh from you its standing place.

The inhabitress of (Maroth) Bitter-town, is in travail about good.

Because evil hath come down from Jehovah to the gate of Jerusalem.

Bind the chariot to the swift horse, thou inhabitress of (Lachish) Horse-town.

Therefore wilt thou give farewell presents to (Moresbeth-Gath) the Possession of Gath.



The houses of (Achzib) False-spring, shall become a disappointing brook to Israel's kings.

Yet will I bring the heir, (Sargon, King of Assyria), to thee, thou citizen of (Mareshah), Heir-town."

**"Make thee bald, and cut off thy hair for the children of thy delight: enlarge thy baldness as the eagles for they are gone into captivity from thee"** (1:16). For a Hebrew man to shave his head and face was a sign of great mourning. This along with the resolve to go naked would be a powerful statement of the suffering and exile he predicted for his people. In the New International Version, "baldness as the eagle" is better rendered, "bald as the vulture."

**"Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage"** (2:1-2). Micah then proceeds to read the stinging indictment against them. They laid awake at night scheming how they might seize the property of unsuspecting neighbors (2:1-2). This very scene was demonstrated by King Ahab and Jezebel who plotted to get Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21:1-15). Land-grabbing and swindling unsuspecting folks out of their property is still with us. Powerful businessmen whose hearts are filled with covetousness grow rich by fraudulent practices. Everyone of them will answer to the great Judge of the universe. Under the Mosaic economy God intended for a family's property be held safe for them and passed to succeeding generations. (For a good discussion of property the Mosaic system see **Smith's Dictionary of the Bible**, Vol. 2, under Heir).

**"Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Behold, against this family shall I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks, neither shall ye walk haughtily; for it is an evil time"** (2:3). God's punishment will be a yoke of evil that will utterly ruin them and thus they will loose all their ill-gotten property. In the coming Assyrian invasion the wealth and property of these wicked citizens will all be swept away. Our just God has a way of insuring that men reap what they have sown (Gal. 6:7).

**"In that day shall they take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We are utterly ruined: he changeth the portion of my people: how doth he remove it from me! To the rebellious he divideth our fields. Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast the line by lot in the assembly of Jehovah"** (2:4-5). The Revised Standard

Translation renders “parable” as a “taunt song against you.” He paints a verbal picture of the greedy landowners, distraught at the thought of losing all their wealth, wailing **“We are utterly ruined.”** They had shown no mercy when their schemes had utterly ruined their victims. The NIV renders vs. 5, “Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot” which was the prescribed way for the proper assignment of land rights. That which they had accumulated by hook and crook would be forever lost.

**“Prophecy ye not, thus they prophesy. They shall not prophesy to these: reproaches shall not depart”** (2:6). Micah reports the response of the people to his message. The RSV helps. “Do not preach—thus they preach—one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us.” They were not the last generation who wished not to hear the unpopular and unflattering truth of God’s prophet.

Next he rebukes the sorry priests that had yielded to the pressures of their worldly constituents. The people did not want to hear of sin, woes and judgment. Thus they said, **“Do not preach....one should not preach of such things”** (R.S.V). Their hireling prophets meekly complied (2:6).

Verse 7 is much clearer in the NIV. The prophet asks his audience, **“Should it be said, O house of Jacob: ‘is the Spirit of the Lord angry? Does he do such things?’”** He immediately responds, telling them **“Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?”** The righteous soul welcomes the message of God’s prophet and profits thereby. The wicked man rejects it and suffers the consequences. If they found his words unpleasant, perhaps they should review their own lives! He then blasts them with yet more charges:

**“...ye strip the robe from off the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. The women of my people ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their young children ye take away my glory for ever”** (2:8-9).

1. They would steal the shirt off a peaceful man’s back (2:8).
2. They would evict a poor widow and take an orphan’s livelihood (2:9-10).

In a voice filled with righteous indignation, he orders them to **“Arise.... and depart; (Get out!) for this is not your resting place”** (2:10). They had defiled their land and now God would drive them out and destroy it.

**“If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people”** (2:11). Evidently they had such man-pleasing prophets working

among them, tickling their itching ears with lies and foolish promises (See II Tim. 4:3-4). He shames them by asserting that if a false teacher came promising **“wine and strong drink”** they would immediately proclaim him their preacher! (2:11).

Having vented his frustrations on the false prophets, he adds a word of hope for the faithful of the land. After the scattering of judgment, God would **“gather the remnant of Israel and bring them home”** (2:12-13). As a good shepherd, the Lord will **“put the together as the sheep of Bozrah, as a flock in the mist of their pasture”** (2:12 b).

**“The breaker is gone up before them: they have broken forth and passed on to the gate, and are gone out there at: and their king is passed on before them, and Jehovah at the head”** (2:13). He describes Jehovah as the one who breaks open the gates, making a way for His remnant to escape their captivity and he will lead them home like a shepherd does his flock. This would occur when God raised up Cyrus the Persian who allowed all captive people to return home (Compare Isaiah 44:28-45:2).

### **Leaders Denounced and Messiah Promised (3:1 - 5:15).**

In his second sermon, Micah denounces the crimes of Judah’s rulers and foretells the day of Messiah’s righteous reign.

**“Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: is it not for you to know justice? Ye who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones, and chop them in pieces as ...flesh within the caldron”** (3:1-3). The rulers, he said, **“hate the good and love the evil”** (3:2). This ugly spirit is yet with us in large measure. Like economic cannibals, they devoured the poor the land (3:2-3). He borrows his image from the butchers who would take the slaughtered beast and prepare it for the kettle.

**“Then shall they (the rulers) cry unto Jehovah, but he will not answer them; yea, he will hide his face from them at that time, according as they have wrought evil in their doings”** (3:4). Their day of sorrow would soon come but God would not hear their cry for help. They would reap as they had sown (3:4).

He heaps scathing rebukes on the false **“prophets that make my people to err.”** Like vicious dogs they **bite** those who do not feed them. They were hypocrites who preached **“peace”** while preparing war against those who

would not stroke them (3:5). He warned that **“it shall be night unto you, that ye shall have no vision ; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine...”** (3:6). God was going to “put their lights out” and they would be confounded and silenced! (3:6-7).

**“The seers shall be put to shame, and the diviners confounded; yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is not answer of God”** (3:7). The word “seer” is sometimes applied to the true prophet (I Chron. 9:22). Here, he speaks of men who only claimed to see into the future, or things unknown to mortal man. Diviners were practitioners of “divination.” They were harshly condemned by Jehovah (Deut. 18:10-12). The men of whom he speaks were false prophets to whom God revealed nothing. When the empty predictions were proven false, they would be ashamed and “shut their mouths.”

In contrast, he boldly declared himself to be God’s Spirit filled representative: **“But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin”** (3:9).

He again turns to the rulers who **“abhor justice, and pervert all equity.”** They built up Jerusalem with the blood of the poor. Judges accepted bribes, priests and prophets taught for money. Still, in the face of all this hypocrisy they vainly boasted, **“Is not Jehovah in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us”** (3:9-11). To such hollow prattle, God’s man warned, **“Therefore, shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps...”** (3:12).

Their cities and fortresses would be destroyed and their land would revert to farmland and pastures.

### **Messiah’s Coming Kingdom.**

In the midst of his fiery condemnation and pronouncements of judgment, Micah cheers his hearers with a vision of Messiah’s coming kingdom. **“But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it, and many nations shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem; and he will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off; and they shall**

**beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more..... and we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever” (4:1-5).**

In words virtually identical to Isaiah’s, he depicts the Messianic kingdom:

1. It would be superior to all earthly kingdoms (4:1).
2. It would be a universal kingdom of many peoples (4:1).
3. It would grow by teaching rather than by war and conquest (4:2).
4. It would originate from Jerusalem (4:2).
5. It would come with a new law from Jehovah (4:2).
6. It would be a peaceable kingdom (4:3-4).
7. It would last forever (4:5).

**“In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble that which is lame, and I will gather that which is driven away, and that which I have afflicted; and I will make that which was lame a remnant, and that which was cast far off a strong nation: and Jehovah will reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever” (4:6-7).** The expression “In that day” ties these thoughts to that of 4:1, the latter days when Jehovah’s house shall be established. This is a continuation of his prediction of that coming kingdom of Messiah. When he would come, all the faithful remnant of God’s people would be rallied and brought safely into his new spiritual kingdom. Through the Son, God will reign over them in spiritual Zion (Heb.12:22-23), the church. He will reign as King of kings (I Tim. 6:15), so long as the earth shall stand (Luke 1:33). It is likely the Hebrews who endured the long years of Babylonian exile found great comfort in these promises about a remnant being salvaged.

**“And thou, O tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, yea the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem” (4:8).** By noting the author’s parallelism we can identify “The tower of the flock. It is the hill of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem. Under Messiah, Jehovah’s kingdom will be restored to its former glory...like that of David’s day. Amos also spoke of the restoration of David’s dynasty (Amos 9:1-12).

**“Now why dost thou cry out aloud? Is there no king in thee, is thy counselor perished, that pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail” (4:9-10a).** These words look ahead to the years when the citizens of the South would be languishing in Babylon. A captive nation without a king.

The fourth chapter closes with a promise to restore them to their former blessings but only after Babylonian captivity:

**“For now shalt thou go forth out of the city and shalt dwell in the field, and shalt come even unto Babylon: there shalt thou be rescued; there will Jehovah redeem thee...”** (4:10b). They would **“dwell in the field,”** means they would be homeless exiles.

**“And now many nations are assembled against thee that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye see our desire upon Zion”** (4:11). The Hebrew nation had always been hated and despised by her heathen neighbors. Now Assyria and her confederates had dreams of taking possession of her.

**“But they know not the thoughts of Jehovah, neither understand they his counsel: for he hath gathered them as the sheaves to the threshing-floor”** (4:12). The prophet reminds his hearers that those pagan nations do not perceive that Jehovah rules over them even as he does over Judah (Dan. 4:25). He will use them to accomplish His purpose on his chosen people and then punish them. As Isaiah explains, Assyria was God’s rod of punishment (Is. 10:5), but **“he (the king of Assyria) meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few”** (Is. 10:7). He continues, **“when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria”** (Is. 10:12). Sheaves of grain are stacked on the threshing floor so they can be crushed and beaten. That will be the end of the story when Assyrian marches her troupes into Judah.(See Isaiah 37:36-38).

**“Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will devote their gain unto Jehovah, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth”** (4:13). In highly figurative language Micah predicts what would happen to the Assyrian invaders. Like powerful beast of the forest, the Hebrews would trample them. A stag or a ram’s horn might be broken in combat, but not if there are made of iron. Their hooves might have grown weary or worn before their battle was finished, but not if they are made of brass. It will be Jehovah who gives them the victory, thus to Him they must dedicate the spoil.

### **The Deliverer and His Deliverance (5:2-5)**

In one of the most glorious prophecies of all, he tells of Messiah’s coming: **“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the**

**thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (5:2).**

Close attention reveals a number of details about our Lord’s advent:

1. He would be born at Bethlehem (5:2)
2. He would be ruler in Israel, heir to David’s throne (5:2).
3. He was an eternal being who would become incarnate (5:2).
4. He would be born of a woman (5:3).
5. Like a good shepherd, he would feed his flock the truths of God (5:4).
6. His dominion would be to the ends of the earth (5:4).
7. He would be the prince of peace who would bring peace to a troubled world (5:5a).

While his contemporaries trembled at the invading Assyrian hordes, Micah confidently predicted that God would **“deliver (Judah) from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land”** (5:6). This was realized when in one night Sennacherib’s vast army lost 185,000 men before the gates of Jerusalem (Is. 37:36-37).

### **God’s Court Case Against His People (6:1-16).**

**“Arise contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear, O ye mountains, Jehovah’s controversy, and ye enduring foundations of the earth for Jehovah hath a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel”** (6:1b-2). To understand this chapter imagine the people of Judah summoned to stand before Jehovah, the great Judge of humanity. Micah records God’s interrogation of the offending people. The mountains and hills are the enduring foundations of the earth. In typical Hebrew style he repeats his point in parallel lines. The mountains and hills are personified...as witnesses to the evils they had committed.

First God asks, **“O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?”** (6:3). He reminds them of how he had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, given them great leaders and preserved them from their enemies (6:5). What more could they ask?

The people sarcastically replied: **“Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high 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 thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (6:6-7).** Note the people were willing to participate in ritual service, but their daily conduct was far from God’s expectation. In his reply, the prophet beautifully sums up the 613 precepts of Moses’ Law in three noble phrases. Toward the law, God expects justice; toward other people, kindness; toward himself, humility (6:8).

**“The voice of Jehovah crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom will see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it” (6:9).** The voice of Jehovah is his prophet! The city is Jerusalem. The man of wisdom refers to all intelligent people who realize the seriousness of the message and its warning. The rod tells us it is a warning of divine discipline (See Isaiah 10:5). He who had appointed the discipline was Jehovah himself.

With divine authority, Micah exposes the multitude of their sins: business men who cheated their customers, men who grew rich by violence, people who were habitual liars. **“Are there treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and a scant measure that is abominable? Shall I be pure with wicked balances, and with a bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth” (6:10-12).** The temptation for businessmen to cheat their customers is so common that every state has a bureau of weights and measures. Every contract has to be audited because of fraud. Such wickedness among the Hebrews must be punished. Thus God said, **“Therefore, I also have smitten thee with a grievous wound; I have made thee desolate because of thy sins” (6:13).** This kind of sinful conduct was so widespread that the judgment would be laid upon the entire nation. The righteous living among them would have to endure the hardships with the sinners mentioned above.

**“Therefore I also have smitten thee with a grievous wound; I have made thee desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied, and thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt put away, but shalt not save; and that which thou savest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but shalt not anoint thee with oil; and the vintage, but shalt not drink the wine” (6:13-15).** “Therefore” shows that these impending judgments are the consequences of their egregious sins.

1. Their country would be made desolate.
2. They would suffer famine.
3. They would be humiliated.



4. Possessions and wealth which they had accumulated would be swept away by invading armies.
5. Crops they had planted would be confiscated by their oppressors.
6. The harvest of their olive trees and vines would be denied them.

**“For the statues of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I may make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing: and ye shall bear the reproach of my people”** (6:16). Rather than conducting their nation and their worship as their father David had taught them, they had taken up the corrupt manners and practices of the house of Omri. Omri was the father of Ahab, the degenerate king of the Northern Kingdom (I Kings 16:29-33). He and his queen, Jezebel, daughter of the pagan Ethbaal, king of Sidon, had led the North into the depths of the vile idolatry of Baal. It eventually led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. Their daughter Athaliah had married King Jehoram of Judah and introduced the same kinds of corruption there. She later seized the throne of Judah. This passage suggests that many of the people evidently went along with this corruption promoted by Ahab’s daughter. The hissing refers to the ridicule and contempt that would in time fall upon the nation that had turned their back on Jehovah their God.

### **Micah’s Lament, His Confidence and His Prayer (7:1-20).**

**“Woe is me! For I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desireth the first-ripe fig”** (7:1). Micah was not happy that he had to announce the judgment that was coming upon his people. The harvest of the summer fruits, was the end of the harvest season. He could see the end of happiness and the coming of misery upon his nation.

**“The godly man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men: they hunt every man his brother with a net. Their hands are upon that which is evil to do it diligently; the prince asketh, and the judge is ready for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth the evil desire of his soul: thus they weave it together. The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge...”** (7:2-4a). The moral situation in Judah was deplorable. In his frustration, Micah speaks hyperbolically. The prophet himself was not so evil. There was always a righteous remnant of faithful servants of God, but the great majority were decadent. **“They hunt every man his brother with a net”** means they preyed on each other. All moral consideration had been abandoned. The rich and powerful had only

to express their wish and public servants such as judges, if properly bribed, would arrange for it to happen. Thorns and briars inflict wounds and pain and so did the nation's rulers. Rather than protect the citizens they oppressed them.

**“Trust ye not in a neighbor, put ye not confidence in a friend; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother...a man's enemies are the men of his own house”** (7:5-6). The moral rot of society had corrupted the sacred of relationships. No one could be trusted, including the closest friends and relatives.

**“But as for me, I will look unto Jehovah; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me”** (7:7). In the midst all of all the sin and corruption, the prophet's faith still shines brightly. This kind of trust and confidence in God is the very essence of true faith. Our faith must take us beyond mere belief that God exists or that the Bible is his Word, it must lead us to trust him to lead and keep us safe in the darkest, most dangerous situations of life. Micah prayed for God's forgiveness and deliverance, **“as in the days of old. As in the days of thy coming forth out of Egypt.....”** (7:14-15). He wanted to see their enemies **“lick the dust like a serpent”** (7:17).

Micah won no popularity contests among his people. They disliked his message of rebuke and despise him for daring to deliver it. They wished for disaster to overtake him. He responded, **“Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, Jehovah will be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of Jehovah, because I have sinned against, him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then mine enemy shall see it and shame shall cover her who said unto me, Where is Jehovah thy God?”** (7:8-10a). These are words of full confidence and faith that God will stand with him, no matter the consequences he may face. People will live to see his warnings come to pass and the prophet vindicated.

**“Mine eyes shall see my desire upon her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets”** (7:10b). Micah had absolutely no doubt that the punishments he warned of would be realized. Most roads in those ancient days were unpaved. The dirt was mingled with the waste from the many draft animals and the garbage of the residents. When rain fell, all of that turned to mire which was crushed without resistance, beneath the feet of people and beasts. So would the nation be crushed by the invading armies of Assyria.

As he nears the end of his lesson, the prophet offers a glimmer of hope to those who would listen. **“A day for building thy walls! In that day shall the**

**decree be far removed. In that day shall they come unto thee from Assyria and the cities of Egypt and from Egypt even to the River, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain” (7:11-12).** After judgment and captivity, they would return to rebuild their nation. For those of the Southern Kingdom, this occurred following the seventy long years of the Babylonian Captivity. Good King Cyrus of Persia, at the prompting of Jehovah, allowed the captive Hebrews to return to the land and rebuild their temple (Is. 44:28; Ezra 1:1-3). Later the walls of the city were rebuilt under the leadership of Nehemiah (Neh.2:1-8). **“Yet shall the land be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings” (7:13).** The blessing of restoration must wait until justice has been satisfied for the evil they had done.

### **The Prophet’s Prayer for His People and God’s Response (7:14-17).**

Micah asks God to **“Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thy heritage, which dwell solitarily, in the forest in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.”** Carmel was a forested mountain with little grass and many dangers for sheep, such as ravines and wild beasts of prey. Bashan and Gilead were pasture lands, perfect for grazing and much safer. He asked God to be their good shepherd who would lead and protect them.

God responded, **“As in the land of Egypt will I show unto them marvelous things. With that promise, Micah then exulted, “ The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hand upon their mouth; their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent; like crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their close places; they shall come with fear unto Jehovah our God, and shall be afraid because of thee” (7:14-17).** Great, powerful nations like Assyria and Egypt would see God’s delivering hand at work and be smitten with fear. Like serpents or insects they would be forced to acknowledge His power and rule over them. In this passage we see the origin of our saying about a whipped person or nation, licking the dust.

In his closing words, he praised God’s abundant and unequalled mercy: **“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth over the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighted in loving kindness. He will again have compassion upon us: he will tread our iniquities under foot; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of sea” (7:18-20).** These are the words A. Pierson called, “one of the most exquisite things to be found in the entire Old Testament.”

**“Thou will perform the truth to Jacob, and the lovingkindness to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old”** (7:20). Truly, Micah was standing on those ancient promises God had made to the fathers of the nation. He was fully confident that God would remember and honor his promises. We should have the same high confidence in every promise He has made to us.

### **LESSONS TO REMEMBER.**

- Micah reminds us that religion and ethics are inseparable.
- Unscrupulous use of power, even though within the bounds of law, will not go unpunished.
- Acts of cruelty toward humanity is an insult to the God in whose image they are made.
- Religion that does not affect the heart and lead to submission to God’s will is worthless.
- Preachers who mold their message to please sinful men are enemies of God and traitors to their post.
- When a man speaks as the Holy Spirit has taught him through the Scripture, he can be bold and courageous.
- Unworthy leaders will lead a nation into destruction.
- True peace will only come when people enter Messiah’s kingdom and heed his teaching.
- We see the reasonableness of God’s requirements that we do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with God (6:8).
- To love mercy is more than to show mercy, for one may show mercy for many reasons and be selective where he does so.
- Our God is merciful, bestowing favor on the penitent.

### **CONCLUSION**

May we who represent God before our fellow men preach with the power and strength, the courage and conviction of Micah the Morashtite. May we personally never lose sight of what Jehovah requires of all men: that we do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with our God! (6:8).

## NAHUM, THE POETIC PROPHET

In the book of Nahum we see and hear the anguished cry of suffering humanity calling for retribution and righteous judgment upon Assyria, the great international aggressor of his day.

### About the Author

The book bears the name of Nahum the Elkoshite (1:1). Until the end of the nineteenth century, the unity of the book and Nahum's authorship were never questioned. Since that time, most liberal scholars have attempted to credit the first chapter to some unknown writer. All that we know of the author is that recorded in his book. His **name** means "consolation" or "comforter." The **location of Elkosh**, his home, is uncertain. It has been identified with Elhush, a village situated two miles north of ancient Nineveh; also with a village in Galilee which Jerome visited. Some identify it with a village in southwestern Judea near Lachish. Capernaum in Galilee literally means "village of Nahum" which may be our best clue. Nahum was a Hebrew patriot who hated Assyria, the archenemy of his nation. He is unique among the prophets in that he had no condemnation for Israel, nor any call for repentance or reform on the part of Nineveh. He simply announced doom!

Contemporary with Nahum in the prophetic office were Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Huldah. Josiah the young reformer, king of Judah, also shared the day with Nahum. The **date** of Nahum's prophecy is deduced from the information in (3:8-10). Thebes, capital of Egypt, had already fallen. That occurred in 663 B.C. Nineveh was yet to fall. That happened in 612 B.C. Within that fifty year interval, Nahum delivered his message. He wrote some 220 years after Jonah who also had predicted Nineveh's fall.

### The Socio-Political Background of Nahum's Message.

The international scene in Nahum's day was dominated by Assyria and Egypt. The decisive battle of Thebes in 663 had made Assyria master of the fertile

crescent. Assyria was founded by Nimrod, great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:8-11). Its capital, Nineveh, was situated on the east side of the Tigris River, opposite the present day city of Mosul in Iraq. Nineveh was capital of Assyria from 1100-800 B.C. and from 705-612 B.C.

The Assyrians worshiped as their principal god, the cruel Asshur. They were primarily a nation of warriors who delighted in raping, ravishing, plundering, and destroying. They have been described as the most sensual, ferocious and diabolical race ever to inhabit the earth. Assurbanipal, one of their great kings, boasted of tearing lips and limbs off of captured rulers, of forcing conquered kings to pull his chariot and of hanging the head of a slaughtered king about another king's neck. Their's was truly a reign of terror. Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria from 669-626 was the greatest patron of literature in pre-Christian times.

Nineveh, Assyria's capital, was thought to be impregnable. Her chief wall was 100 feet high and wide enough for four chariots to race abreast. She had 1200 defense towers about her walls. The moat, outside the walls, was 140 feet wide and 60 feet deep. For more information on Nineveh, see the chapter on Jonah.

The fall of Nineveh occurred in 612 B.C. as Nahum had predicted. The Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians united to attack the city under the Median King Cyaxares. They first took all the surrounding cities and fortifications, then laid siege to Nineveh herself. Fearing the worst, her leaders proclaimed a hundred day feast to propitiate their gods. The river supplying their moats overflowed and undermined the great walls, causing them to collapse. The king, Esar-haddon II, seeing his defenses broken, had himself and his family burnt alive in his palace to escape the wrath of his enemies. The city was totally destroyed. So complete was her overthrow that for centuries no one even knew the location of her ruins.

### **Assyrian Invasions of Palestine**

Tiglath-pilisar (745-727 B.C.) invaded northern Israel and deported some of her people in 734 B.C. Shalmanezar IV (727-722) laid siege to Samaria but died before her fall (II Kings 18:9-12). Sargon II (722-705) took Samaria in 722. He dismantled and deported the Northern Kingdom. Sennacherib (705-681) took all of Judah and sieged Jerusalem. His army was destroyed at the gates of Jerusalem by the Lord's angel (II Kings. 18:13-19; 37). Esar-Haddon (681-625) passed through Palestine and invaded Egypt, capturing Thebes in 663 B.C. He was reigning when Nahum wrote.

## About Nahum's Book

The author presents his material in a **poetic style**. J. C. McFadyen writes, "Poetically, the little book of Nahum is one of the finest in the Old Testament." No other prophet, save Isaiah, is equal to Nahum in boldness, ardor or sublimity. Brice notes that his is "the most vivid and passionate fragment of declamation in all literature. The book consists of one single poem. From the three uses of the musical term "selah," some have concluded that Nahum's poem was set to music for use in worship. The writer was a master of the Hebrew literary art.

Nahum has but one **theme**; the doom of Nineveh. It was soon to come. He writes from the standpoint of a citizen of Judah (Compare 1:4, 15; 2:1-2). He has no word of condemnation for Judah, nor does he call for repentance on the part of Nineveh. It is too late for that. His message is designed to comfort the bruised and broken nation of Judah. It is a cry of joy at the coming of judgment upon Assyria, the evil aggressor. It is the "fervent expression of the outraged conscience of mankind" (Homer Hailey). His book is a terrific arraignment against all nations that seek glory by war and oppression. Nahum has nothing to say about Messiah or his coming kingdom.

The words of Nahum are not quoted in the New Testament. The "beautiful feet" passage of (Rom. 10:15) is more likely from (Is. 52:7) than from (Nahum 1:15).

In the Septuagint, the book of Nahum is placed after Jonah since both relate to Nineveh.

Some **liberal scholars** assert that 1:2-2:3 of Nahum are part of a later acrostic poem, prefixed to the prophet's original work. For a good discussion and refutation of this subjective criticism. See an **Old Testament Introduction** by John H. Raven.

### Some Miscellaneous Facts About Nahum's Book

It is not possible to fully understand Nahum without some knowledge of Nineveh, the Assyrian nation, her evil ways and final overthrow. Isaiah also predicted the destruction of the Assyrian empire (Is. 10:24-27). Four great national sins of Assyria were singled out by Nahum for special condemnation: ruthless military power (2:11-13); unscrupulous commercial practices (3:16); slavery and witchcraft (3:4-5). Assyria is "an object lesson to the empires of the modern world, the absolute necessity for a nation's continued vitality,

of that righteousness, personal, civic and national- which alone exalteth a nation” (Kennedy).

It is of value to compare and contrast Nahum and Jonah. Jonah proclaimed God’s love for all men (4:2) while Nahum declares his holiness and justice (1:2, 6). The men of Nineveh had repented at Jonah’s preaching, but they soon reverted to their old ways. Nahum now pronounces their doom.

Two major aspects of God’s nature are depicted by Nahum; his mercy (1:7, 15) and his righteous judgment (1:2).

Diodorus Seculus relates an ancient prophecy that Nineveh would never be taken until the river should become its enemy. He reports that during the siege of Nineveh, the river flooded and undermined the walls for some two and one-quarter miles, causing their collapse (Compare 2:6). So completely was Nineveh destroyed that prior to her excavation in the nineteenth century, many skeptics questioned if she had ever existed. Lucian wrote, “Nineveh is perished, and there is no trace left where once it was.”

In Nahum’s message we see the agony of a tormented world anxiously awaiting a deliverer.

Fragments of an ancient commentary on Nahum were found in Cave #1 at Qumran along with other Dead Sea Scrolls.

**Literary men** have been favorably impressed by Nahum’s message. Kyle Yates said, “For sheer beauty, poetic imagery, dramatic description, and vivid imagination, Nahum is unsurpassed....” George A. Smith wrote, “His language is strong and brilliant: his rhythm rumbles and rolls, leaps, and flashes like the horseman and chariots he describes.” DeWette observes that “It is a classic in all. It is marked by clearness, by its finished elegance, as well as by fire, richness and originality.”

### **Keys That Unlock Nahum’s Message**

The key verse is 1:7-8. **“Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that take refuge in him. But with an over-running flood he will make a full end of her (Nineveh’s) place, and will pursue his enemies in darkness.”**

The **key thought** is, God will utterly destroy Nineveh.

The **key words** are, “He will make a full end.”



## A Simple Analysis of Nahum

I. Nineveh's Judgment Decreed (1:1-15).

II. Her Judgment Described (2:1-13).

III. Her Judgment Defended (3:1-19).

### AN EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT

#### Nineveh's Destruction Declared (1:1-2:13).

The Author's Introduction (1:1). **"The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."** When a prophet speaks or writes of a "burden" to be delivered upon some person or nation, it is a message of future judgments to be imposed by Jehovah. He immediately tells us that the subject of his vision is God's judgment on Nineveh, the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire. The author tells us he received his message in a "vision." The writers of Hebrews tell us that God spoke to the fathers in divers or different portions and manners (Heb. 11:1). Thus, some received their message in dreams, visions, trances and others by direct communication. In each case, the holy man of God spoke or wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). Nahum was an Elkoshite, in that he hailed from Elkosh, a small Hebrew village of which we have no certain knowledge.

**"Jehovah is a jealous God and avengeth; Jehovah avengeth and is full of wrath; Jehovah taketh vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies"** (1:2). Nahum is a spokesman for Jehovah the God of the Hebrews. He begins his message by telling his readers about the God he represents. He is jealous, full of wrath and takes vengeance on his enemies. His wrath he will pour out on their heads. **"Jehovah is a jealous God."** According to Webster, our modern use of the word jealous nearly always means "(1b) disposed to suspect rivalry or unfaithfulness: apprehensive of the loss of another's exclusive devotion." While there are some cases of this meaning attached to God's jealousy, in this verse the meaning is "(3) vigilant in guarding a possession" (**Webster's Collegiate Dictionary**). He wants his readers to know that his God is capable of **"wrath"** toward his enemies. Wrath is violent anger. It is "retributory punishment for an offense or a crime" (**Ibid.**). Human beings are prone to attribute to God their own weaknesses. We often take extreme positions or engage in extreme actions. Some preachers seem to dwell only on God's wrath. Others know only his love for sinners.

Each conveys to his hearers a faulty concept of our God. The truth is he is a loving God (John 3:16) who is angered by the rebellion of man. Although he is longsuffering in calling them to repentance (II Pet. 3:9), he will punish severely those who are his determined adversaries. Having said this about God's nature, Nahum proceeds to show what the angry God is going to do to the cruel Ninevites.

**“Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means clear the guilty”** (1:3a). God's anger is tempered by his patience. We must be careful lest we misjudge his patience for lack of concern or lack of intent to punish. Peter wrote of mockers who would say of God, “where is the promise of his coming...all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (II Pet. 3:4). This reminds us of Friedrich von Logau's lines,

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;  
Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all.”

The unforgiven guilty will receive their just penalties either now or in eternity (II Cor. 5:10). When we contemplate the judgement of nations, we must remember that nations are judged in time, while individuals will be judged in eternity. When the tourist in Iraq views the scattered ruins of ancient Nineveh, he can appreciate the prophet's message.

**“Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel; and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt; and the earth is upheaved at his presence, yea, the world and all that dwell therein”** (1:3b-5). With poetic flourish, the prophet describes the mighty power of God in the world He created. His power is seen in destructive tornadoes and hurricanes. It is seen in droughts which cause lakes and rivers to dry up and vegetation to die. It is seen in devastating earthquakes. This lesson is largely missed by folks in our well-educated world. While seeking to understand the natural causes of these phenomena, they forget that the Creator can use these destructive things to punish the wicked. Unbelieving secularists in our society are outraged if some Christians dares to suggest that God might have used some act of nature to punish an ungodly people. They want a world without consequences for ungodly behavior.

**“Bashan”** was the rich farming and pasture land, east of the Jordan. **“Carmel”** was the forested mountain on the western coast of Palestine. It jutted out into the Mediterranean. **“Lebanon”** was the mountainous territory north of Galilee, renowned for its great cedar trees. Nahum's point is God's judgments

are seen throughout the land from east to west and from the north southward. All suffer when God punishes his people. Of course, hills don't literally melt. The context is speaking of earthquakes. Mountains quake, the earth is upheaved and the hills melt. To understand this, think of the great landslides that occur during excessive rainfall or in connection with earthquakes.

**“Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by him”** (1:6). These two questions are rhetorical in nature. All thinking people know that no one can stand before our God when he is angry with them. Malachi asked the same question of his readers (Mal. 3:2). God's wrath is expressed in many way. His bolts of lighting strike the earth. In ancient times, they did not know of lightening rods for their buildings. They had no meaningful fire protection service. His great power can smash even the great rocks that defied ancient man. They had no explosives to use in breaking them. He can cause a mountain explode with fiery destruction that sends molten and shattered rock over its slopes.

**“Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that take refuge in him. But with an over-running flood he will make a full end of her place and will pursue his enemies into darkness”** (1:7-8). While he stresses God's wrath and judgment upon his enemies, Nahum wants his readers to know of God's goodness to all who look to him for refuge. The sons of Korah sang, “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). In contrast, God will make a full end of Nineveh and pursue them as they flee their fallen citadel. Some nations are punished, but survive and in time regain their standing. Nineveh was totally destroyed So thorough was her destruction and burial beneath the desert sands, that for centuries people could find no trace of her existence. Only since the mid-nineteenth century have we known the site of Nineveh's ruins.

**“What do ye devise against Jehovah? He will make a full end; affliction shall not rise up the second time. For entangled like thorns, and drunken as with their drink, they are consumed utterly as dry stubble”** (1:9-10). What could mortal men do in response to the great Jehovah? Could finite men outthink the infinite Jehovah? He is invisible; they could not see him. He is omnipotent they could not overpower him. He is omniscient, they could not hide from him. What can bows, slings and spears do against storms, floods, earthquakes and lightening bolts? In his vision, the prophet see the Assyrian soldiers staggering like drunks. He sees them tangled in briars and thorns, unable to escape the raging fire that will consume them. Nineveh is finished. She will not reemerge a second time to afflict her neighbors and God's people.

God had used the Ninevites to afflict His people (Is. 10:5-21), but they will afflict them no more.

**“There is one gone forth out of thee that deviseth evil against Jehovah, that counselleth wickedness”** (1:11). We are uncertain just who the **“one gone forth out of”** Nineveh was. Perhaps it was Sennacherib who in 705 B.C. led his armies into Palestine. He captured all of Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Rabshakeh, one of his generals, publicly belittled and defied Jehovah before the gates of Jerusalem (Is. 36:1-20). Shortly thereafter **“the angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold these were all dead bodies”** (Is. 37:36-37). Not long after, Sennacherib himself was assassinated by his own sons. (Is. 37:37-38).

**“Thus saith Jehovah: Though they be in full strength, and likewise many, even so shall they be cut down, and he shall pass away. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. And now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder”** (1:12-13). The great size of the Assyrian army and their prior success in combat did not intimidate Jehovah. He could confidently say, **“so shall they be cut down and he shall pass away.”** God then directs his words to his people, the Hebrews. **“I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more.”** Again we direct our readers to Isaiah 10: 5-19). God had used the Assyrians as **“the rod of (his) anger”** to punish the Hebrews and their neighbors. The evil Assyrians had no idea they were serving God. They fought for conquest, land and booty. When he had accomplished His divine purpose God then destroyed those who had eagerly punished the children of Abraham (Is. 10:12). Afterward His people would be free of the Assyrian yoke.

**“And Jehovah hath given commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image; I will make thy grave; for thou art vile”** (1:14). The words of this verse are spoken to the Assyrians. Not only would they be defeated, they would be completely destroyed from the face of the earth for their vileness. In the introduction, we pointed out the extreme cruelty of the Assyrians toward their victims. They were known for raping, robbing, ravishing, pillaging, destroying and terrorizing. For this they paid dearly.

**“Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows; for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off”** (1:15). These words of encouragement are spoken to the suffering Hebrews. The

prophet sees the messenger shouting his message as he passes by. “Nineveh is fallen, we are free of her yoke.” He encourages his fellow Hebrews to celebrate their deliverance with feasts of thanksgiving unto God. Paul uses similar words to describe the gospel message proclaimed by missionaries of Christ to a world enslaved to sin (Rom. 10:16). This passage is the beginning of chapter two in the Hebrew text.

### **The Judgment of Nineveh Described (2:1-3).**

**“He that dasheth in pieces is come up against thee: keep the fortress, watch the way, make their loins strong, fortify thy power mightily” (2:1).** These words are spoken to the Ninevites. The prophet sees invading armies laying siege to their city. History tells us it was the Babylonians, the Medes and Sythians whose armies attacked Nineveh. It may be that the prophet purposely chose the word “dasheth” to described what the invaders would do to the city and its inhabitants. The Assyrians commonly killed the babies of nations they conquered by dashing their heads against stones (Hos. 13:16; Nahum 3:10). Now they would be dashed by their attackers. They would reap as they had sown (Gal. 6:7). He mocks the Ninevites, urging them to prepare for a battle he already knew they would lose. Making the **“loins strong”** refers to strapping on their leather girdle that strengthened their waist and legs and held some of their weapons. Also it signified to pull up the skirt of their robe and tuck it under the belt so it would not hinder their movement when in combat. The idea is to get ready for the battle.

**“For Jehovah restoreth the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel; for the emptiers have emptied them out, and destroyed their vine-branches” (2:2).** By this he informs us that the overthrow of Nineveh was decreed by Jehovah. For agents he used the three heathen nations mentioned above. God was doing this as a just recompense for the harm they had inflicted upon His people. They had looted the land of the Hebrews and other conquered nations, now it was their turn to be looted. The NIV renders this, “The Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel.” The Assyrians had defeated the Northern Kingdom and carried away everything of value, including the best of her citizens. They had imported prisoners from other nations to till her land. They brought their idols and corrupted Jehovah’s worship (II Kings 17:24-34). Typical of Hebrew writers, he twice referred to the nation’s founder, **“Jacob”** and **“Israel.”** Such repetition is called parallelism and is a literary devise used to emphasize a point. Jacob was the father of the ten tribes. God bestowed upon him the name Israel as a name of honor (Gen. 32:28).

**“The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the cypress spears are brandished. The chariots rage in the streets; they rush to and fro in the broad ways: the appearance of them is like torches; they run like lightnings”** (2:3-4). In his vision the prophet sees the invading armies. They are dressed in uniforms of scarlet, their shields are painted red (See Ezekiel 23:14). He sees the attackers inside the city, the battle raging from street to street and house to house. Accompanying their foot soldiers were war chariots with deadly iron cutting blades attached to their wheels. Their cutting blades flashed in the sun as they race through the streets pursuing the retreating Assyrians.

**“He remembereth his nobles: they stumble in their march; they make haste to the wall thereof, and the mantelet is prepared”** (2:5). The RSV is better, “The officers are summoned. They stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall, the mantelet is set up. He sees the invading troops struggling to get their mantelet in place before the gates they are trying to breach. A mantelet was a large portable shield under which the soldiers could work who were trying to force open the gate. Soldiers on the walls would be dropping rocks and flammables on them, but the mantelet would deflect them.

**“The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved. ...And she is carried away; her handmaids moan as with the voice of doves, beating upon their breasts”** (2:7). Nineveh was situated on the eastern banks of the Tigris River. Her towering walls were surrounded by a moat 60 ft. deep and 140 ft. wide. Her inhabitants thought she was impregnable. Sluice gates controlled the water in the moats and canals within the city. Diodorus Seculus cited an ancient prophecy that Nineveh would not be taken until the river became her enemy. He notes that during the siege, the river flooded and undermined her great wall for 2 1/4 miles. With the collapse of the wall, the invading hordes soon brought the city to her knees. The city of Nineveh is pictured as a once proud woman being led away by her conquerors. **“Her handmaids”** are the women of the city, like the servants follow their mistress, they are driven from their city bemoaning their loss and plight, openly demonstrating their consternation by smiting their breasts. The Arab women still respond to disaster in this way.

**“But Nineveh hath been from of old like a pool of water: yet they flee away, Stand, stand, they cry; but none looketh back”** (2:8). To illustrate the fleeing population of Nineveh, Nahum tells us for generations she had been like a pool or reservoir of water. Now the gates were opened and the water rushes out, leaving the city, empty like a lake whose dam was destroyed. The

military officers are depicted calling the people back...especially the soldiers, **“Stand, stand”** and defend your city, but none look back. Their one thought is escaping the wrath upon them.

**“Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold for there is no end of the store, the glory of all goodly furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste; and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and anguish is in all loins, and the faces of them all are waxed pale”** (2:9-10). In his vision, Nahum sees the triumphant soldiers in the city. He hears a voice telling them to help themselves to the immense treasure the fleeing citizens left behind. Nineveh had been extracting the wealth of neighboring nations for years. The booty they had stored up within their great fortified walls. Now she was being stripped bare by the looters. **“She is empty...void and waste.”** Her fleeing citizens are terrorized. Great fear has gripped every heart. Their despair was seen in their ashen faces.

**“Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion and the lioness walked, the lion’s whelp, and none made them afraid? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with prey and his dens with ravin.”** (2:11-12). The national symbol of the Assyrian Empire was the lion. So the prophet uses an allegory of a pride of lions and their den to describe Nineveh. For generations, like lions, the Ninevites had ruled the region and terrorized their neighbors. They had preyed on them and taken their possessions and people at will. Their den was stocked with the treasures they had taken from others. **“Ravin”** is rendered “torn flesh” by the RSV which stands for that when they had torn from its rightful owners. Now God taunts them, by asking, Where have they gone?

**“Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke and the sword shall devour thy young lions; and I will cut off the prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard”** (2:13). Remember, Nahum wrote long before Nineveh’s overthrow. He records God declaration and promise. He is against the Ninevites and will destroy their war machine and people from the earth. The treasures they had accumulated will be left for others.

### **A Vindication of God’s Judgement on Nineveh (3:1-19).**

**“Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and rapine; the prey departeth not”** (3:1). In this chapter the author explains why Nineveh’s judgment was coming. She was a **“bloody city.”** The victims of her aggressive wars were

innumerable. Her cruelty to captives was legendary. “Of King Ashur-nasir-pal we are told, “His usual procedure after the capture of a hostile city was to burn it, and then to mutilate all the grown male prisoners, putting out their eyes; after which they were piled up in a great heap to perish in torture from the sun, flies, their wounds and suffocation; the children; both boys and girls, were all burned alive at the stake; and the chief was carried off to Assyria to be flayed (skinned) alive for the king’s delectation” (**Hall’s Ancient History of the Near East**, p. 445). No agreement, covenant or alliance with the Ninevites could be trusted. They were full of lies. The Ninevites deserved the judgments God was sending upon them. **“The prey departeth not.”** Ebenezer Henderson thinks this refers to the prisoners taken from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Others think it means Assyria was always taking from others, never returning or giving back.

**“The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels, and prancing horses, and bounding chariots, the horseman mounting and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of corpses, and there is no end of the bodies; they stumble upon their bodies...”** (3:2-3). Again, in his vision, the prophet sees and hears the invading army doing their deadly work of destruction.

**“—because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.”** (3:4). More charges are lodged against the Ninevites; crimes that well deserve the punishment they will receive. God personifies the great city, liken her to an attractive harlot. Just as harlots use their outward attractiveness to seduce men, so the leaders of Nineveh used every clever enticement to bring other nations under her control. He then likens her to a witch who through deception and superstition intimidates people. Solomon, in warning his sons of harlots, observed “Her house is the way to Sheol, Going down to the chambers of death” (Prov. 7:27). So anyone who dealt with Nineveh was going to suffer for it.

**“Behold I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will uncover thy skirts upon thy face; and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing stock”** (3:5-6). The Ruler of nations promises that he would humiliate the proud Ninevites before their neighbors. The figure he uses is that of a harlot who has been publicly punished. In the ancient world it was common that they be stripped naked and displayed in some public place such as the stocks used in our colonial times. The people



would cast rotten fruit and vegetables and fecal material upon them. Their punishment would be for all to see.

**“And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?” (3:7).**

In her day of distress, Nineveh will have no friends to come to her aid. None loved her. They feared her. Under threat of destruction they had obeyed her, but now they turn their backs on the suffering city. None would mourn her passing.

### **Nineveh is No More Invincible than was Thebes (3:8-11).**

**“Art thou better than No-Amon, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about her, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was of the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity; her young children also were dashed to pieces at the head of all the streets; and they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains” (3:8-10).** The prophet addresses the leaders of Nineveh who boasted that their city was too strong to be taken. **“No-Amon”** was the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes. It was situated some 450 miles south of modern Cairo. Its fabulous ruins can be seen at Luxor. It was the seat of Amon, the sun god. Thebes served as capital of the Egyptian empire from 711-663 B.C. He describes the fortifications of the great city. Her borders were on both sides of the mighty Nile River, which he called **“the sea.”** She ruled over Egypt and Ethiopia. Put and Lubim were confederate with her. **Lubim** is thought to be modern Libya and **Put** might possibly refer to modern Somalia. If that is the case we can appreciate his reference to her strength. With territory stretching from the Mediterranean southward to the equator and eastward to the Indian Ocean. **“Her strength...was infinite,”** like Nineveh’s and yet she fell to the Assyrians. Ashurbanipal had conquered No-Amon in 663. His troops sacked the city and brutalized her population. The Assyrians killed their infants by dashing them against stones. The cream of her citizenry was marched away in chains. His point is, if this great catastrophe fell upon the great city of Thebes, why do the Ninevites think they can escape a similar fate?

**“Thou also shalt be drunken; thou shalt be hid; thou also shalt seek a stronghold because of the enemy” (3:11).** He tells the Ninevites they will be dazed and stagger like drunken men, seeking a safe place to hide from

the marauding army of invaders. Obadiah likens God's judgments to a cup of poisoned drink. "For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink, and swallow down, and shall be as though they had not been" (Obad. 16).

### **None of Her Defenses and No Amount of Preparation Will Save Nineveh (3: 12-19).**

**"All thy fortresses shall be like fig-trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold thy people in the midst of thee are women; the gates of thy land are set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire hath devoured thy bars"** (3:12-13). He chides them, telling them their fortresses will not stand before the invading enemy. Rather than a brave resistance, her men will be frightened and helpless as women. Fire would destroy the great wooden bars that secured her gates from the enemy without. They will be as helpless before their attackers as ripe figs are to the those who come to devour them.

**"Draw thee water for the siege; strengthen thy fortresses; go into the clay, and tread the mortar; make strong the brickkiln. There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off; it shall devour thee like the canker-worm; make thyself many as the canker-worm; make thyself many as the locust"** (3:14-15). He taunts the Ninevites to get busy preparing for the coming siege, though it will be of no avail. The siege would keep them from going outside for water. The attackers would cut off any water flowing into the city. So he advises, store up water. Nineveh was highly fortified. Her primary walls were 100 feet high and sufficiently wide for four chariots to race abreast upon them. She boasted of 1200 defense towers and a wide and deep moat around her walls. He ridicules their efforts to make additional fired bricks. All of their efforts would be in vain. **"The mortar"** was the pit where the clay and sand were mixed with water. It was prepared for the molds by men wading in the mud with their bare feet. The bricks were fired and hardened in the **"brickkiln."** As the bricks were burned in the kiln, so the people would be burned in the destruction of their city. **"The sword would devour"** them like the canker-worm devours the green plants. Of course the sword can do nothing by itself. It is the swordsman that makes the weapon do its brutal job. The figure he uses is a metonymy. **"The canker-worm"** is the early stage grasshopper or locust. As they strip the vegetation, so would the invading armies strip Nineveh. While speaking of locusts, he again taunts them, saying even if they could multiply their numbers like the locust, they could not save themselves.

**“Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the canker-worm ravageth, and fleeth away. Thy princes are as the locusts, and thy marshals as the swarms of grasshoppers, which encamp in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are”** (3:16-17). Still using the analogy of the locusts, Nahum mentions the merchants of the nation who, seeing the coming attack, fled the city like locusts. Nineveh was the great emporium of her day. All trade routes led to and from her. Her agents traverse the world about them bringing wealth and treasure to the city. Although they had grown rich because of her, they would not stay to defend her. The ruling class of the city, her princes, had also multiplied in the days of her prosperity and power. They too would flee when they realized the fall of the city was approaching. The meaning of her **“marshals”** is uncertain. The RSV renders it “your scribes.” The NIV translates it “your officials.” Whatever the specific meaning, they too would flee like locusts, rather than risk themselves to defend their city. They would never be seen again.

**“Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; thy nobles are at rest; thy people are scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather them. There is no assuaging of thy hurt; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the report of thee clap their hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?”** (3:18-19). Nahum’s closing words are addressed specifically to the King of Assyria. When one addresses a person not present, it is a literary device called an *apostrophe*. The man of God sees the end result of his prophesy. The **“shepherds”** of Assyria are those who were responsible for leading and protecting the people. Her **“nobles”** were included among the shepherds. They are now all slumbering in death. The citizens who survived the siege and destruction of Nineveh are like sheep, scattered in the mountains. Without leaders and protectors, there they will perish. Nineveh has suffered a mortal wound. Some cities have been devastated, yet recovered to flourish again, but this will not be the case with Nineveh; **“Her wound is grievous.”** When a person dies, we expect there to be someone who will mourn their passing. When the Assyrian nation died, no one mourned. Rather there was celebrating and rejoicing. People were applauding her death. Why? Because for generations all had felt the oppression of the Assyrians. Rather than mourning, there would be heard a sigh of relief and thanksgiving that at last she had been given her due.

What do you think the response would have been if the king of Assyria had chanced to read the words of Nahum’s book? He was reigning over the most powerful nation on the earth. Kings of nations feared and trembled at the king’s word. The lives of millions of subjects were in his hands to bless or

destroy. In the royal court, the first question likely to be heard would be, “Who is this idiot who dares to write such foolishness?” That some obscure preacher, living hundreds of miles away, dared to make such an outlandish prediction would likely be received with scorn and ridicule. When the final assault was being launched against Nineveh, do you wonder if anyone in the court, recalled what the prophet had said? Hebrews who lived to see the overthrow of Nineveh would say, surely God spoke through this man, Nahum!

## **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- There is a limit to the patience of God.
- We see the universality of God’s government in the world. He rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan. 4:17).
- God will punish wicked nations and individuals according to their works (Nahum 1:3).
- God’s wrath must be understood in terms of his love.
- A nation built on pride, cruelty, force and selfishness cannot hope to have friends in its day of calamity.
- All that God can do with a wicked, impenitent nation is destroy it.
- In the day of distress and anguish, men who do not know God must endure untold sufferings.
- Arrogance that leads to senseless destruction of life and property arouses the anger of God.
- No mercy will be shown to those who show no mercy.
- The student of world history will see that it is about the judgement of nations.
- There are no strongholds secure from the vengeance of God.
- They that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matt. 26:52).
- Men and nations are saved to serve. When they cease to serve God and humanity, judgment comes.
- In Nahum, we see the goodness and the severity of God (Rom. 11:22).
- “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small; though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all” (H. W. Longfellow).

**HABAKKUK,****THE MAN WHO COMPLAINED TO GOD****About the Author**

Of Habakkuk, we know nothing save that contained in his book. No information is recorded of his family, birthplace or life. He was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. A prophet was one chosen of God to deliver his message to his people (Ex. 7:1-2; 4:16). Rabbinic tradition says that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunemite woman whom Elisha raised from the dead (II Kings 4:17-37). No serious stock can be placed in such traditions. Some have theorized that he might have been a Levite temple musician on the basis of the scribal note at the end of 3:19 in his book. The name Habakkuk means, "love's embrace" or "he that embraces." Tradition says that he fled to Egypt when the Babylonians took Jerusalem in 587 B. C. Eusebius, historian of the early church, reported that Habakkuk's grave was at Keilah, south of Jerusalem.

Habakkuk's ministry is dated during the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim (612-605 B. C.). He was contemporary with Jeremiah, Huldah and Zephaniah. It does not appear that he was a public preacher as was Jeremiah.

Normally, a prophet's job was to deliver God's message to the people, but we see Habakkuk taking his and the people's complaint to Jehovah. He wrestled with two profound theological problems. In his book are the answers he found. His problem was twofold: (1). Why were his prayers unanswered and (2). How could God use the evil Babylonians for judgment of a people who were better than they? He had serious questions about the justice and righteousness of God. He could not understand how a holy God could use wicked instruments to accomplish his will. It is noteworthy that God did not provide a direct answer to the prophet's questions.

George Robinson described Habakkuk as “a philosopher, earnest and candid... sensitive, speculative; the suppliant among the prophets.” As was Thomas among the Apostles, so was Habakkuk among the prophets. In our subject, we see the conflict of a doubting mind with a believing heart. Such questions as Habakkuk raised would only be asked by a person who believed in a righteous, all-powerful God. Such issues would never bother an atheist. Habakkuk is only one of many troubled believers who have asked God, Why?

John Dryden observed that “virtue in distress and vice in triumph makes atheists of mankind.” In his bewilderment, Habakkuk boldly challenged God to defend his actions. Joseph Parker said, “He represents pessimism or despair as it never was represented before, and on the other (hand) he rises to heights of faith which even Daniel did not attain.”

### **The Historical Background**

The prophet had witnessed King Josiah’s great reformation in Judah and then its loss of momentum. He heard, with great sorrow, the report of Josiah’s untimely death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho in the battle of Megiddo. In 612 he heard the news of the fall of cruel and mighty Nineveh. For a brief period of time, Pharaoh Necho controlled all the lands west of the Euphrates, including little Judah.

Babylon, formerly a tributary state of Assyria, was rapidly rising to prominence under king Nabopolassar. His son, Nebuchadnezzar was a brilliant young general in the Babylonian military. Historians have called Nebuchadnezzar “The Napoleon of the East.”

In Judah, the evil sons of Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, reigned. Social, political and religious conditions were deplorable (See. 1:2-4). Lawlessness and tyranny were rife. Strife and contention were the norm. Righteous people were oppressed, especially the poor among them. The majority of the people lived in open, flagrant sin. Idolatry flourished throughout the realm. For a look at the historical record, see II Kings 23:29-37.

### **About the Book**

Habakkuk has been called, “one of the finest writers in the Old Testament. The beauty of his language and his chaste style entitle him to a place in the front rank of the prophetic school” (Ward). J. Woffendale says that Habakkuk’s style “is surpassed by none of the Hebrew prophets in dignity and sublimity.” The same author continues “His denunciations are terrible, his derision bitter,

his consolation, cheering.” Of the hymn of the third chapter, George Robinson said, “It is bold in conception, sublime in thought, majestic in diction and pure in rhetoric.” G. C. Findley called it, “a splendid ode, a meditation on the grandeur of Jehovah, which deserves to be counted...amongst the masterpieces of Hebrew poetry.” Weald wrote that it is “a composition unrivaled for boldness of conception, sublimity of thought, and majesty of diction.”

**Habakkuk’s approach** is unique; for rather than address the people directly as God’s spokesman, he taught them by relating his doubts and questions and the answers he found. He wrote his vision down at the time and preserved it so that when the fulfilment came, folks could clearly perceive that it was according to the prophecy (See 2:2-3). **Habakkuk’s purpose** was to keep alive the flame of hope and trust in God in the face of national disintegration.

Other Hebrew writers also wrestled with the problem of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Among them were Job, the Psalmists David (Ps. 37), the Sons of Korah (Ps. 49), Asaph (Ps. 73) and Jeremiah (Jer. 12:1-4). While Job was concerned with the suffering of individuals, Habakkuk dealt with the suffering of nations.

Habakkuk reflects a familiarity with the writings of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. Three New Testament books contain his great message that “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

This book has no specific Messianic promises, but his grand statement on faith found its full meaning in the gospel of Christ.

In their arrogant pride, liberal critics have dissected Habakkuk’s book and sought for evidence of multiple authorship and editing. Their conclusions are highly subjective and prejudicial. For a thorough examination and refutation of these views the reader may wish to consult Hobart Freeman’s **An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets**.

The following miscellaneous facts about Habakkuk may be of interest to some. In the Septuagint, the prophet’s name is Hambakoum. In the Assyrian language, the word hambakuko is the name of an unidentified garden plant. Cave # 1 at Qumram yielded a commentary on chapters 1 and 2 of Habakkuk from the first century B. C. The Jews read Habakkuk’s third chapter in their synagogues on Pentecost. The apocryphal stories of Bell and the Dragon contain legendary stories about Habakkuk.

This little book has impressed learned men across the ages. G. C. Findley wrote, “Here is the first inspired appeal against man’s inhumanity to man, and

the crimes committed in the name of empire.” Daniel Webster wrote, “What finer conception for a masterpiece could any artist desire than the picture of the prophet Habakkuk setting in the midst of utter ruin and desolation, singing, in spite of everything, faith’s joyous and triumphant song.” While on a diplomatic mission to France in 1782, Benjamin Franklin, the great statesman, met with a group of Bible rejecting skeptics. He asked to share with them an ancient verse he had found. Having primed their curiosity, he read a copy of Habakkuk’s third chapter. It was received with extravagant admiration. They asked “Who wrote it; where did you find it?” Imagine their chagrin when he told them it was from the Bible (F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*).

### **Keys Which Unlock Habakkuk’s Message**

There are two **key verses** in the book.

2:4 “...the righteous shall live by faith.”

2:20 “But Jehovah is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him.”

The **key words** are “why? (1:3), “faith,” i.e., faithfulness (2:8); “woe” used five times in 2:6-19 and “yet” (3:18).

The **key thought** of the book is, When we are bewildered at the apparent triumph of the wicked at the expense of the saints, we must trust God’s providential rule and be faithful to Him.

The **key characters** are two: Habakkuk, the troubled prophet of God and Jehovah, the patient ruler and judge of men and nations.

### **A Simple Summary of the Book.**

- I. Look and see the problems of faith (Chapter 1)
- II. Stand and see the solution (Chapter 2).
- III. Kneel and worship the God whom you see at work (Chapter 3).

## **EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT**

### **The Prophet’s Dialog With God (1:1-2:4).**

Verse one is an introduction to the book. It identifies the author, and tells us that he received his message from God in a vision which he “did see.” His



book is a burden, i.e., a solemn message of doom or hardship delivered by an inspired man.

Verses 2-4 contain a passionate protest of Habakkuk. **“O Jehovah how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?”** He was greatly bothered that God seemed to be ignoring his prayers.

Several problems are mentioned as troubling the writer. There was violence, but God would not save (vs. 2). He cried to God about this matter. Cried out means to “scream” with vehemence. God seemed unresponsive to the situation. The land was full of iniquity and perverseness, destruction and violence, strife and contention. To him it seemed as though God was simply sitting on his throne, watching but doing nothing (vs. 3). **“The law is slacked”** (vs. 4) means literally, chilled or paralyzed; therefore not functioning. “There was a total cessation of justice.” It **“doth never go forth”** (vs. 4). The wicked have the righteous surrounded with hostile intent. Justice is so twisted that the wicked are rewarded and the righteous punished (1:4b).

In verses 5-11, we have God’s reply to the prophet’s complaint. He challenges Habakkuk to look around at the military and political movement of the nations and see the marvelous and astounding work He is doing. God is judging the wickedness of the world, including that of His own nation of Israel (vs. 5). The astonishing part of it is that it is the wicked Chaldeans (i.e., Babylonians) who are His instrument of punishment. The prophet found this hard to believe (5b). Isaiah shows how God used the Assyrians to punish the nations of an earlier generation (Is. 10:5-19). The Babylonians are described as “bitter,” i.e., cruel, fierce, war-like and “hasty,” i.e., rash and impetuous. The **“earth”** they would conquer was the fertile crescent stretching from Egypt on the Southwest to Assyria on the North and the ancestral land of Chaldea on the Southeast (vs. 6). **“Their judgment and dignity proceed from themselves”** means that they are a “self-willed people who acknowledge no master (Homer Hailey) and “a disregard of all principles of international law” (F. C. Cooke) (1:7).

With a series of figures, he describes the invincible Chaldean calvary. **“Their horses are swifter than leopards”** and **“more fierce than evening (hungry) wolves”** (vs. 8). **“...they fly as an eagle that hastens to devour.”** **“They come...for violence.”** The set of their faces is **“forwards,”** meaning, they “advance as the desert wind” (NIV). **“They gather captives as the sand”** i.e., without resistance (vs. 9). The king of Babylon scoffs at kings and princes, he is neither afraid of nor deterred by any ruler (vs. 10). When he confronts walled, fortress cities, i.e., “strongholds,” he heaps up dust, i.e., makes a siege mound and captures the fortress. He is invincible ! (1:10).

Like a devastating tornado, the Babylonians will pass through the land wreaking havoc upon it. But as the mightiest tornado will soon spend its energy and be finished, so will Babylon herself be brought to judgment by God and destroyed (1:11). Remember it was not the intention of Nebuchadnezzar to serve Jehovah. The evil king was driven by sinful greed and ambition. In his wise providence, God used the Chaldeans to inflict judgement upon a sinful people. He then visited the Babylonians for their guilt. (Compare Isaiah 10:5-19). In 538 the Medes and Persians administered God's wrath upon Babylon. A part of the guilt of this wicked aggressor nation was that "his might" was "his god" (1:11b).

God's response provokes yet another perplexing question in the prophet's mind (1:12-21). Habakkuk first praised God by confessing his eternity and his holiness (vs. 12a). He is grateful to know that Israel will be spared; **"we shall not die"** (1:12b). His problem is, how can the holy God ordain and use such a wicked ungodly nation as pagan Babylon as his instrument of justice? (1: 12). Habakkuk had been taught that Jehovah is **"of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that (he) canst not look on perverseness"** (vs. 13). How then can He look upon and use the treacherous Babylonians? Another problem he expresses is, How can God **"hold (his) peace when the wicked Nebuchadnezzar swalloweth up the man (Judah) that is more righteous than he...?"** (1:13b). He likens the Babylonian army to a great fishing net and the people, both good and bad, like fish of the sea. When they pass through the land the destruction will be indiscriminate; the righteous will perish with the wicked and a sinner like Nebuchadnezzar could not care less. **"He rejoiceth and is glad"** (1:15).

The conquering Chaldeans worship their net and drag (1:16a). These things stand by metonymy for their military might. Many of the ancient peoples worshiped the god of war. The Romans, who came later, called this god Mars. Hence our word, *martial* which is used to describe military affairs. The heathen worshiped their military power because by it they expanded their borders and increased their riches. By it they held their enemies at bay and kept their homelands safe (vs. 16b). Verse 17 asks, Is the aggressor to forever keep filling and emptying his drag net of the hapless nations?

Having dared to present his case and complaint before the mighty Judge of the universe, the prophet resolves to take his stand on a "watch-tower" and wait to see how God will respond to his complaints. "The prophet, in spirit, retires for a time to a lonely tower, a place of private meditation, whence...he may look over the far distance and undisturbed, he may hear the voice of God" (F. C. Cook) (2:1).

God's answer was not long in coming: **“And Jehovah answered me and said, write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it”** (2:2). The instruction to write so that he may run that readeth it, likely means one of the following explanations:

1. Publish the vision in such a way that whoever desires to read it may easily do so.
2. Post the prophecy in a public place so that one running by may see it.
3. Write it in such short, simple terms that a herald can shout its message as he passes those he encounters.
4. It might possibly mean that those who see the warning can hasten to flee or to prepare for the coming invasion.

**“The vision is yet for the appointed time”** (2:3a), means that the time of its fulfillment is already fixed in God's mind. That the vision **“hasteth toward the end and shall not lie”** (2:3b) means literally that God's prophesy panteth towards its fulfillment like an animal running to its den. It **“shall not lie”** means the fulfillment promised will not be frustrated or evaded. There will be no disappointment. The prophet and his people must patiently “wait for it” to be fulfilled in God's own good time (2:3). Man is prone to grow restless when God's promised judgments seem to be delayed (II Pet. 3:4). Be confident says God, “it will surely come.”

The Chaldean shall fall, says God, **“because his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him”** (2:4a). In contrast, **“the righteous shall live by his faith”** (2:4). To Habakkuk, **“faith”** means much more than our common definition. To him it meant faithfulness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness! Martin Luther took these words of the prophet and made them the watchword of his Protestant Reformation. However, he gave a definition to faith unknown to either Habakkuk or Paul. To the divinely given word “faith,” Luther added his word “only.” His great declaration was that salvation is “Sola fide,” i.e., only by faith. The true definition is set forth by Paul in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision (i.e. being a Jew) availeth anything, nor uncircumcision (being a Gentile): but faith working through love.”

The principle point of Habakkuk is seen in the antithesis he utilized:

1. The king of Babylon shall be destroyed because he is puffed up toward God.
2. The righteous man shall live because of his faith in God.

Thus his message to his people is, Whatever happens, you must believe in God and trust that he is working all things for your good (Rom. 8:28; Acts 27:25).

### **Woe to the Oppressor Nation (2:5-20)**

Chapter 2:5-20 consists of a series of prophetic woes pronounced upon the evil Babylonian aggressors. Verse 5 is hopelessly obscured in the American Standard Version of 1901. The NIV is much clearer:

**“Indeed, 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 takes captive all the peoples.”**

The subject of this passage is the king of Babylon. Two factors contributed to his aggressive conduct. He was given to wine. “Drunkenness (was) a special sin of the Babylonians...(and) was the immediate cause of the downfall of the Chaldean dynasty...” (F. C. Cook) (Compare Daniel 5:1-4). He was a “proud man” and pride is the root of most crimes against men and nations (Ps. 10:2; Jer. 48:29). Driven by pride and inflamed by wine, the king of Babylon was not satisfied to stay at home in his own dominion, he set out to conquer and take other lands. His appetite for conquest was as large and voracious as that of Sheol. Sheol is the grave, and stands here for death which never tires of consuming its victims. He was determined to “gather unto him all nations” by defeating them and making them his possessions (2:5).

All of those subject people who had been conquered, looted and humiliated by Nebuchadnezzar’s troops will take up a taunting (i.e. mocking, derisive) proverb against their common oppressor (2: 6a). This brings us to the first of the six woes. Note that each woe identifies some specific crime and pronounces certain punishment for it.

1. **“Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his”** (2:6b). Remember that this is spoken of the king of Babylon. **“How long?”** is elliptical. The meaning may be, “How long will he be allowed to hold his ill-gotten possessions? or, “How long before God will punish him?” The thought continues, woe to him **“that ladeth himself with pledges.”** The NIV is clearer, “and makes himself

wealthy by extortion.” He refers to pledges exacted from conquered nations obligating them to pay tribute to Babylon (See Lamentations 1:1). “...to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!” of the KJV is uncertain but could mean that the wealth thus gotten will prove no more valuable than clay (dirt) in the long run. It may, by metonymy, refer to the many documents of tribute which would have been engraved on tablets of clay as were all Babylonian documents.

Chapter 2:7 predicts that the plunderer shall be plundered. “**Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee...**” This uses the imagery of serpents to describe how the Medes and Persians would one day subdue proud Babylon and loot and plunder her. Thus would God’s judgment be fulfilled. Nations, like men, reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7). Nations however are judged in time, while men will be judged in eternity.

2. “**Woe to him that getteth an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high...**” (2:9). Nebuchadnezzar’s gain was evil because he obtained it by plundering other kingdoms. Like the eagle seeks to make her nest secure by building it on high rocky cliffs (Obad. 3-4), so Nebuchadnezzar thought that by situating and fortifying the city of Babylon as he did, it would be impregnable. It straddled the Euphrates and had monstrous walls, 300 ft. high, 85 feet thick and set 35 feet in the ground. There were eleven miles of these walls (Rawlinson). In an ancient inscription found at Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar said, “Thus I completely made strong the defenses of Babylon. May it last forever” (F. C. Cook). Needless to say, those great walls and fortifications meant nothing when God determined to give the city over to the Medes and Persians. They diverted the river, marched under the walls and entered the unlocked inner gates. The city fell in a night. Today it is a heap of ruins in the midst of the desert. The aggressive policies of Nebuchadnezzar were both shameful and sinful (2:10). The stones and timbers of Babylon’s buildings and walls are personified and pictured as crying out at the injustice of building the city with the wealth stolen from others (2:11).

3. “**Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity**” (2:12). This woe pronounces judgment on his use of slave labor in building his capital city. Heathen nations of the ancient East had little respect for human life and dignity. Captured peoples were forced to labor for the king. They were driven and beaten by their slave masters. Such barbaric activity was “**not of Jehovah of hosts**” (2:13). Of such actions God did not approve. From heaven’s vantage point, the Babylonians were busy building their grand city so God could totally destroy it with fire (2:13). The fulfillment of Jehovah’s predictions about the destruction of Babylon would cause men the world around to acknowledge and honor Him (2:14). Isaiah pictures God

challenging the idolatrous prophets to a contest. The one who could accurately predict the future and bring it to pass would be the true God (Is. 41:21-42:9). **“As the waters cover the sea”** means that recognition of God would be universal when men saw His judgments on Babylon. Only secondarily could these words be applied to the Christian age.

4. **“Woe to him that giveth his neighbor drink, to thee that addest thy venom and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness”** (2:15). This verse is often used by those seeking a text against the selling of strong drink. The careful student will note that it speaks rather of Nebuchadnezzar who not only over indulged in strong drink himself, but who evidently used it in accomplishing his diplomatic ends. When wine flows, good judgment is soon drowned. A drunken king or ambassador was unable to negotiate the best interest of his nation. **“Addest thy venom”** is rendered **“puttest thy bottle to him”** by the KJV. This makes it a simple parallel to **“giveth his neighbor drink.”** If we take it to be **“venom”** it might mean a drugged or poisoned wine designed to quickly stupify and disable a person such as an ambassador.

To **“Look on their nakedness”** means to gaze upon them with contempt in their humiliated situation as did Noah’s son (Gen. 9:20-25). Likely the prophet had in mind more than Nebuchadnezzar getting a diplomat drunk and stripping him of his possessions. Most likely that example was meant to illustrate Babylon’s policy of intoxicating her neighbors with deceptive, flattering words and promises while secretly maneuvering to bring them into subjection and plunder them (Pusey). As a just reward for her shameful conduct, the mighty Jehovah will make Babylon drink the cup of wrath and judgment (Compare Jeremiah 25:15-17; 51:6-8). Babylon’s fall would be both humiliating and destructive. The nakedness of the city would be exposed. **“Let thy foreskin be uncovered”** illustrates that shame of their nakedness when the city fell (2:16b, see footnote). Like men, **“Jehovah’s right hand”** is said to be his arm of strength by which he wields his instrument of punishment (2:16c).

**“Foul shame shall be upon thy glory”** is an extension of her judgment described as drinking the cup of the wine of God’s wrath. The KJV renders the words, **“shameful spewing”** which pictures a drunken man vomiting and soiling his fine clothing. So the Babylonians would be utterly humiliated by God’s judgments (2:16d).

Five charges are then lodged against Nebuchadnezzar.

A. **“For the violence done to Lebanon”** (2:17). This likely refers to the wanton stripping of Lebanon’s forests for Nebuchadnezzar’s building projects.

This the Assyrians had done (Is. 37:24). Remember that the Babylonians had almost no forests in their desert land. Some think that Lebanon, the towering mountain stands symbolically for the kingdom of Judah (See Jeremiah 22:6 for such usage.)

B. For **“destruction of beasts.”** This may refer to their war policy of slaughtering the livestock of conquered people or to the mad lust for hunting “for which these were proverbial” (F C. Cook).

C. **“Because of men’s blood”** would refer to the slaughter of human life in their wars of aggression and in their slave labor camps.

D. **“For the violence done to the land.”** This could refer to military practices of destroying crops, fruit trees, wells and cisterns of conquered people.

E. **“For the violence done to the city and to all that dwell therein”** (2:17). These last two most likely refer to the destruction of the land and cities of Palestine, especially Jerusalem (See Jeremiah 51:12-14). Notice he speaks of **“the city”** which to Habakkuk’s readers would have been their beloved Jerusalem. For all these crimes God would punish Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom.

5. **“Woe to him that saith to the wood”** (i.e. his wooden idol), **awake; to the dumb stone (image) arise”** (2:19). This final woe is spoken against Babylon’s idolatry. With biting sarcasm, he ridicules those who look to such man-made objects to deliver them from the wrath of the living God. Isaiah used a similar tactic. (Compare Isaiah 44:9-11, 18-20; 46:1-2) having showed the impotence of the lifeless gods created by skilled artisans, he sets forth in vivid contrast the living God whom he and Israel served.

**“But Jehovah is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him”** (2:20). As sung in our hymn, **The Doxology**, people are urged to be respectful and reverent in worship. In the prophet’s mind the world’s population must stand quietly and hear the instruction of the living God. Especially must they not complain and protest about God’s manner of running his world and administering justice. Likely Habakkuk at this point had come to realize the he himself had been rash and hasty in complaining to God so he speaks first of all to himself. Jehovah’s glory was in Jerusalem’s temple, but Jehovah’s throne “ is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4).

### **The Prophet’s Anthem of Praise (3:1-9).**

Habakkuk concludes his message with one of the most vivid and beautiful psalms of the Bible. Verse 1 tells us it is a prayer set to music. *Shiginoth* is a

musical expression. Although obscure, Delitzsch explains it as “a species of rhythmical composition, which, from its enthusiastic irregularity, is admirably adapted for songs of victory or triumph.”

The hymn is divided into three parts:

1. His prayer that God will revive his people (3:2).
2. A vision of God’s future plan (3:3-15).
3. The lesson he had learned (3:16-19).

His prayer is expressed in three lines, **“Oh Jehovah, I have heard the report of thee and am afraid”** The **“report”** that made him afraid is the **“speech”** (KJV) that God had given him in the two previous chapters. He trembled with awe and amazement at the things God had revealed unto him concerning judgements.

**“O Jehovah, revive thy work in the midst of the years”** (3:2). Revive thy work of deliverance as in other crises of the past (Compare Psalm 90:13-17). **“In the midst of the years”** means at the present time of crisis. The prediction of judgment had been made, the execution of it was yet to come. They needed deliverance immediately, before it was too late.

**“In wrath remember mercy.”** Sinners, then as now, need mercy, not justice, else they would all perish. In every age the prayer of all righteous men has been, **“Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer”** (Ps. 4:1). Mercy would not spare an impenitent nation, but it would save the righteous remnant.

### **His Vision of Salvation (3:3-15).**

In these verses we have a **“theophany,”** i.e., **“a visible manifestation of deity.”** The prophet, in a vision, sees the mighty God coming down to administer justice upon the earth. He saw God **“coming from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.”** Both Teman and Paran are located in the land of Edom, south of the Dead Sea. The prophet borrows his imagery from the earlier inspired Scriptures. (See especially Deuteronomy 33:2 and Judges 5:4). Just as God came in the old days to deliver Israel from Egypt and lead them safely through the wilderness, so he will come again to rescue his people.

**“Selah”** is another musical notation that marks an interlude and instrumental response, after which the singing recommences.

Chapter 3:3b-6 describes the glory and majesty of the great Jehovah and his power to conquer his enemies. **“His glory covered the heavens”** like the



rising sun. God's visible presence is often depicted as "light, brilliant as the sun (See Ezekiel 1:27-28; Matthew 17:2; Revelation 1:16). Like the sun, **"he (God) had rays coming forth from his hand."** Such pictures of God are not to be interpreted literally. God is invisible (I Tim. 6:15-16). For the mind of finite man to comprehend such a God He must be explained by comparisons with things we do recognize. When described as a man, we call such figures, "anthropomorphisms." The great power of God himself was hidden within that brilliant light of his glory. The Hebrews spoke of the divine light as the "shekinah," i.e., "the glory of the Lord."

As God comes forth to deal with his enemies, the prophet sees, **"the pestilence"** going forth before him to destroy his adversaries and **fiery bolts** of lightening to smash those who oppose him (vs. 5). All things are available for the great Creator to use in judgment. Ezekiel speaks of God's four sore judgments: the sword (war), famine, evil beasts and pestilence (Ezek. 14:21). David reminds us that "Fire and hail, snow and vapor; stormy wind, fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8). How could mortal man resist a God so great that even the creatures and the elements serve as his warriors?

Habakkuk sees God standing and measuring (surveying) the situation on earth and then observing the enemy, he scatters them asunder (3:6). The **"eternal mountains (that) were scattered"** are the nations of the world that He broke and scattered. Mountains often are used to symbolize earthly kingdoms (Is. 2:2). **"The everlasting hills"** refer to ancient kingdoms such as Egypt which had fallen and would fall before Jehovah. We can visualize the vast armies of aliens scattered like chaff before the mighty Lord of Hosts.

The key of this section is 3: 6c. **"His goings were as of old."** As he had come forth to deliver his people and punish their adversaries in days past, so would he come to deal with their current crisis.

In verses 7-9 of chapter 3, two heathen nations, Cushan and Midian, are selected as typical of all God's enemies. Their tents are in affliction and the curtains of their tents did tremble. Tents and curtains stand by metonymy for those who dwell in them. These heathen enemies are terrified at the sight of Israel's God. Cushan is, the same as our modern Ethiopia. In ancient times, Ethiopia was one with Egypt. This then looks back to God's judgments on Egypt in Moses' day. So devastating, were those plagues that the Egyptians begged Israel to leave them (Ex. 12:31-33). Midian afflicted Israel for seven years. Then God raised up Gideon and by his tiny band of patriots routed and humiliated that heathen nation (Judg. 7:15-25).

Chapter 3:8-11 is an interjection. He interrupts his description of God's judgment to ask a series of questions:

**“Was Jehovah displeased with the rivers?”** This refers to Moses turning the water of the Nile to blood (Ex. 7:20) and to the opening up of Jordan when Israel crossed over (Josh. 3:14-17). **“The sea”** refers to the Red Sea which opened up to let the redeemed hosts pass over (Ex. 14:21-25). The answer to these questions is “No.” God was not angry with the streams of water. Rather, He manifested his power over these streams and the sea by using them to punish his enemies and to deliver his people.

Like a conquering king, Jehovah is pictured as riding through the land in his battle chariot with his bow in hand to guarantee the keeping of his oath to the tribes of Israel (3:8b-9a). **“Thy bow was made quite bare”** tells us God was ready for battle with His enemies. His bow was not in its sheath, but in his hand ready to launch his destructive arrows. God's oath is immutable for he cannot lie (Heb. 6:17-19a). It is thus a strong refuge to those who's hope is “set in him.” Moses similarly describes God as a great warrior, thrashing his enemies with sword and bow” **“I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh”** (Deut. 32:42).

Verses 9b-11 of chapter 3 record great moments of the past when God judged sinners of the earth.

**“Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers;  
The mountains saw thee and were afraid;  
The tempest of waters passed by;  
The deep uttered its voice;  
And lifted up its hand on high”** (3:9b-10).

This likely refers to the great deluge, in the days of Noah, when except for Noah and his family, the entire sinful race was destroyed. **“The fountains of the great deep were broken up”** (Gen. 7:11). The mountains being afraid, pictures the earth convulsed by earthquakes. The **“deep”** refers to the vast bodies of subterranean waters (See Gen. 49:25 and Deut.33:13). The voices of the deep is the roar of rushing waters.

**“The sun and moon stood still in their habitation, at the light of thine arrows as they went”** (3: 11). The standing still of the sun and moon is an allusion to Joshua's victorious battle in the valley of Ajalon over the Amorites kings (Josh. 10:12-14). **“The light of (his) arrows”** and spear speaks of lighting bolts which are described as part of Jehovah arsenal (Ps. 18:14). It

is interesting that at the battle of Ajalon more were killed by the violent hail storm which God sent, than by Joshua's troops (Josh. 10:11).

**“Thou didst march through the land in indignation; Thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, For the salvation of thine anointed; Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked man, Laying bare the foundation even unto the neck”** (3:12-13). The Lord of hosts is seen marching through the land in indignation, thrashing the nations and saving his anointed people Israel (3:12-13a). “Judgment against one may be salvation for another” (Homer Hailey). **“The head out of the house of the wicked man”** that was mortally wounded, refers prophetically to the king of Babylon and his dynasty. His dominion would forever cease. This was accomplished by the Medo-Perisian defeat of Babylon in 538 B.C. “Laying bare the neck” (3:13d). Means the head was struck from the body even as David decapitated Goliath (I Sam. 17:51).

Verse 14 of chapter 3 elaborates on the method and extent of God's victory. **“Thou didst pierce with his own staves the head of his warriors”** This means that God turned upon the invading enemy the destruction the wicked ones had prepared for Israel. So did the Midianites destroy each other in their battle with Gideon's army (Judg. 7:22). The Medes who were former allies of Babylon. They joined forces with the Persians to destroy her (Jer. 51:11).

**“They came as a whirlwind to scatter; Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst tread the sea with thy horses, The heap of mighty waters”** (3:14b-15). This described the intent of the invading Babylonians and their destructive power. When it seemed that certain destruction was coming on Israel, God is seen treading the sea with his chariots charging to the rescue of his people (3:15) This, no doubt, looks back to the destruction of Egypt's army in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21-28). It is important to remember that in 3:2-15 we are reading of a thrilling and awe inspiring vision the prophet saw that showed him what God could and would do for his people in view of what he, had done for them in the past. It is described in highly symbolic and poetic terms. Note that God is described as a mighty warrior on his horse or in his chariot. The literary device that describes God as a man is called an “anthropomorphism.” It is not to be interpreted literally.

The lesson Habakkuk learned is set forth in (3:16-19). The humbled prophet brings his lesson to a close with a statement of what he had learned from his experience.

First he had learned of God righteousness, holiness, justice and power. So his **“body trembled, (his) lips quivered at the voice”** he has heard (3:16a).

**“Rottenness entered into his bones,”** means that he was too weak with fear to stand before the majestic God.

Secondly he learned to be patient as God worked his plan **“I must wait quietly for the day of trouble, for the coming of the people that invadedeth us”** (3:16d). To **“wait quietly”** means to do so without murmuring or complaint. He had found a new dimension of faith. If everything dear is destroyed, he must trust God to do the right thing (3:17-19). He lists all the things that an agricultural people like Israel depended on for survival; fig trees, vines, olive trees, grain fields, flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. If all are lost they will still have God to protect and provide for them. Such faith will bring joy in the face of sorrow! (3:18). Jehovah will give them the strength needed to survive. As the wild antelope they will safely walk upon the treacherous high places far above all the dangers in the dark valley.

This ends one of the most beautiful, memorable and valuable books in the Old Testament. Its great lesson of trusting faith is needed by every soul on earth today. May God grant us such faith as Habakkuk found.

### **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- A doubting mind needs a devoted heart.
- God never scolds the sincere questioner.
- Questions about God and life provoke us and drive us to search out the answers in the wonderful will of God.
- Atheists have no problems as did the prophet. Only those who believe in God worry about sin and justice.
- A little knowledge of God will often cause problems but with fuller knowledge answers come.
- Since God’s thoughts and ways are far superior to ours, we should not expect to fully fathom everything God does or allows to be done (Is. 55:8-9).
- Scripture does not teach the survival of the fittest, but it does teach the suffering of the best.
- Evil bears the seed of its own destruction, whether in God’s people or heathen nations.
- **“Let the righteous, however baffled his faith be by experience, hold on in loyalty to God and duty, and he shall live”** (G. T. Smith).

- We see God using the kingdoms of this world to accomplish his will, even without their knowledge and consent. He then punishes them for the evil they do (Is. 10:5-19).
- God has all the ages to demonstrate his divine justice. The years are a crucible of God to manifest the essential weakness of sinful people.
- “Through the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small; Though with patience He stands waiting, With exactness grinds He all” (H. W. Longfellow).
- When Habakkuk only looked at his circumstances, he was bewildered and confused (1:3). When he waited for God and listened to His word, he rejoiced in song (3:18-19).
- The real purpose of religion is not to remove all doubts, but to assure us of God’s control of our lives and our world.
- When the perplexing problems of life come, and they will, we must mount our watch tower of faith and catch the vision of God at work for us in his world.



## ZEPHANIAH

### A Messenger of Judgment Day

The book of Zephaniah was written by a prophet who was burdened with the terrible thought that doom was about to come upon the wicked world in which he lived.

### About the Author

It is **“the word of Jehovah which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi...”** (1:1). His name means, “he whom Jehovah has hidden or protected.” His father’s name was Cushi, which literally means “Ethiopic.” From this, some have speculated that his father was an Ethiopian but such a conclusion is unwarranted. Zephaniah was a member of the royal or Davidic family. He traces his genealogy back four generations to King Hezekiah (1:1). This deduction is disputed by some, but why else would he alone of the prophets trace his pedigree that far? This would make Zephaniah a distant cousin to Josiah, King of Judah.

The prophet was likely a resident of Jerusalem. This is reflected in his exceptional knowledge of the city. He mentions the fish gate, the second quarter and the Maktesh (a deep valley, possibly the Kidron valley) (1:10-11). James Hastings observes that “in the first few verses of Zephaniah we see almost as much of Jerusalem as in the whole book of either Isaiah or Jeremiah.” As a member of the royal family and a citizen of Jerusalem, the prophet had adequate opportunity to observe firsthand the crimes of his people.

Zephaniah was thoroughly familiar with the Law of Moses and the earlier prophets. He was a fiery preacher who spoke with fury and effectiveness. His burning message rebuked a people who were rapidly losing the power to respond to a serious challenge. His austere nature has gained for him the label of “the puritan or the protestant preacher.” After reading his book, many sinners have called him fanatical.

Zephaniah did his work “**in the days of Josiah, son of Amon, king Judah**” (1:1). Josiah reigned from 639-608 B.C. The prophet’s labors were done in Judah before and during the time of Josiah’s great reformation which began c.a. 621 B.C. Since the evils which Josiah abolished were yet present when he wrote, we would **date** Zephaniah prior to 620 B.C.

Contemporary with Zephaniah were Jeremiah, Nahum, Huldah the prophetess and possibly Habakkuk. Josiah, Zephaniah and Jeremiah were all young men in their early twenties when the great reform began. (Compare Jeremiah 1:6; II Kings 22:3). Our subject was almost certainly one of those prophets who aided the young king’s efforts to purge Judah of idolatry and restore the proper worship of Jehovah (II Kings 23:2).

The **one consuming thought** of Zephaniah’s message was the coming day of Jehovah’s judgment (1:7). He saw that judgment was God’s method of purifying the remnant of Israel and rewarding the wicked nations of the world. Nahum, his contemporary, saw judgment coming upon Nineveh alone, but Zephaniah saw it as universal, beginning with Jerusalem. No other prophet painted the day of Jehovah with more vivid and fearful images. The idea of an imminent invasion, of an extraordinarily devastating nature, underlies his description of the day of the Lord. It is generally conceded that the invasion of the fierce Scythians about this time in history prompted his message.

Zephaniah offered no hope of averting the threatened punishment, only that the remnant might be spared (2:3). He foresaw a faithful remnant of battered survivors of the coming judgment; a handful of meek, righteous souls saved by the mercy of God (3:5-20).

The prophet predicted a coming day when all nations would worship Jehovah (2:11). Also, he prophesied of a time when true worshipers would worship God wherever they dwelled and not just in Jerusalem (2:11); (Compare John 4:20-24).

Zephaniah did not dwell on the social sins of his people, rather he thundered out against the idolatry and corruption of God’s worship (1:4-6).

### **The Historical Background**

Zephaniah lived in a time of moral and spiritual decay. The world order was rapidly changing. The great Assyrian Empire that had dominated the Middle East for 150 years was in a state of disintegration and decay. Assurbanipal was their last **great** king. Savage Scythian hordes were sweeping all across the land. They poured out of southern Russia and plagued the Middle East for



some 28 years. They invaded Egypt but were bought off by Pharaoh Psamiticus I. On their return north, they plundered the Philistine's temple of Aphrodite in Ashkelon. This fearsome invasion may have provoked Zephaniah's message. The Scythians evidently bypassed Jerusalem. The prophet had urged repentance so the Hebrews might be "**hid in the day of Jehovah's anger**" (2:3). The powerful Babylonian kingdom under Nabopolassar was set to crush under his feet the entire region.

Josiah, a young man of only 23 years, ruled Judah following the deaths of Manasseh and Amon, two of the nation's worst kings. Under the reigns of these two wicked rulers, Judah was largely converted to heathenism. True worshipers of Jehovah and his faithful prophets were persecuted and driven out. Princes and judges were so corrupt that justice was impossible. Oppression, violence, and injustice were the order of the day in Jerusalem. The entire life of the royal court was at odds with the kind of preaching God's prophet would deliver. The people had been so stimulated by false things that they had grown calloused and hardened.

Zephaniah depicts his people as unreachable, the rulers as predators, the courts as merciless, the prophets as traitors and the priests as profane. It was a dark day for the nation of Judah. For **background reading** one should see II Chronicles 33:1-35:27: and II Kings 21:1-23:30.

### **Josiah's Reformation**

Josiah came to the throne of Judah in 639 B.C., when only eight years old. His regent was the godly high priest, Hilkiah. In his sixteenth year, the young king began to seek the Lord (II Chron. 34:1-3). When twenty, he moved to suppress idolatry and unlawful worship (II Chron. 34:3-7). At age twenty-six he launched a renovation of Jehovah's temple which had fallen into disrepair (II Chron. 34:8-13). The book of God's law was discovered by the repairmen (II Chron. 34:14-28). Upon hearing the solemn warnings of God's Word, the young king was deeply moved. It is likely that the threatened judgments of Deuteronomy 28-30 were the part that so deeply moved him. The young ruler called the nation's leaders together and read to them the divine book (II Chron. 34:29-33). Following his leadership, they covenanted together to restore God's ways and walk in them. The purge of idolatry was extended nationwide as the king sought to stamp out that evil. A great Passover feast was observed by the nation. Such had not been done in generations (II Kings 23:1-25).

In the thirty-ninth year of Josiah, Pharaoh Necho of Egypt passed through Palestine en route to attack the declining Assyrians. When Josiah and his troops sought to block the Egyptians' advance, the king was struck by an arrow and mortally wounded (II Kings 23:29-30). At his untimely death, his reform movement faltered and the nation soon reverted to her former wickedness. Within thirty-four years, the Hebrew state was swept away by the triumphant Babylonians.

### **About the Book**

The book bears the name of its inspired writer. Our English word Zephaniah derives from the Hebrew. In Greek and Latin Bibles it is Sophenias.

Zephaniah's prophecy was **addressed to the people of Judah** to warn them of an impending day of judgment from the Lord.

The author's **purpose** was to awaken the Hebrews from their lethargy and complacency and turn them back to God's ways. His message offered consolation and hope to the faithful remnant, but struck fear in the hearts of the wicked.

The **literary style** of the book is that of a solemn dirge-like poem. It is written in a very forceful manner with a tone that is stern and rugged. His use of the language is fresh, lively and pure. The writer leans heavily on the words and concepts of his predecessors, especially Isaiah and Amos.

As is commonly the case, self-appointed **liberal critics** challenge the integrity of this portion of Scripture. While virtually every one of them has a different view, in general they challenge the authenticity of part of chapter one and most, if not all of chapters two and three. For a good review and refutation of this criticism, see the **Books of Nahum and Zephaniah** by T. Miles Bennett in the **Shield Bible Study Series**.

No quotes from Zephaniah are found in the New Testament. His term, "day of wrath," is reflected in Romans 2:5 and Revelation 12:1.

### **Some Miscellaneous Facts about the Book**

- Zephaniah's message inspired Thomas of Celano, a medieval monk, to write the famous hymn, "Dies Irae, Dies Illa," which has been called the greatest Latin hymn.

- From 1:12, artists of the Middle Ages depicted Zephaniah as a man with a lamp searching the city for sinners.
- The Hebrew text of Zephaniah has been quite well preserved (R.H. Harrison).
- Zephaniah has no prediction of a personal Messiah, although 2:11 and 3:9 seem to speak of Messiah's age.
- **Syncretism** was a fundamental religious error of the prophet's day. That was the practice of blending two or more religions in ones life and worship. He charged that the people "swear by Malcom and Jehovah" (1:5).

**Men of letters** have been impressed by Zephaniah. George A. Smith said, "no hotter book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor tree nor any blossoms live in it, but everywhere, fire, smoke, and darkness, drifting, chaff, ruins, nettles, salt pits, and owls and ravens looking from the windows of desolate palaces." James Hastings calls him, "the fiercest of all the prophets." A.B. Davidson wrote, "The book provides us a valuable insight into the religious, social conditions in Israel prior to the exile..." "It is valuable for its comprehensive view of history. The history of the nations is but another name for the operation of Jehovah among them....Zephaniah has been styled, "the classical pronouncement of divine judgment in the Old Testament."

### **Keys That Unlock the Prophet's Message**

Two **key verses** capture the main thoughts of the book:

1:14; "The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near and hasteth greatly..."

3:13; "The remnant of Israel...shall feed and lie down and none shall make them afraid."

The **Key words** are "jealousy" (1:18; 3:8) and "remnant" (2:7, 9; 3:13).

The **Key concepts** are "day of the Lord," used seven times and "Jehovah in the midst" for judgment (3:5) and for salvation (3:17).

### **Simple Summaries of Zephaniah**

I. Judgment Upon Judah (1:1-18).

II. Judgment Upon All Nations (2:1-3:8).

III. Deliverance For the Faithful Remnant (3:9-20).

Another way to analyze the book is as follows;

I. The Lord in the Midst for Judgment (1:1-3:8).

II. The Lord in the Midst for Salvation (3:9-20).

### **Exposition of the Text**

**“The word of Jehovah which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah” (1:1).** In these lines we have the prophet’s family lineage. That he traces his ancestry to Hezekiah, shows that he was of the “seed royal,” i.e., the house of David. He dates his book by telling us it was produced **“in the days of Josiah”** the king of Judah. Josiah reigned from 639-608 B. C.

### **The Sins of Judah Delineated (1:2-18).**

**“I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the ground, saith Jehovah. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the face of the ground, saith Jehovah” (1:2-3).** Zephaniah gets right to the point, God is going to judge the earth! The destructiveness will be comparable to that of Noah’s day. None will escape and many will perish! In the ravages of war, all creatures suffer. Soldiers lived off the ground they occupied. All things eatable were taken. More particularly, he mentions beasts, birds and fish to emphasize that nothing will escape the horrors of the coming day of God’s judgment. The word “stumblingblocks” is derived from a Hebrew term that mean “ruins.” It is rendered “heaps of rubble” in the NIV. He evidently uses the term metaphorically to describe the ruined state of affairs in the nation. They had ruined personal integrity, the sacredness of marriage, God’s religion and government. It would certainly include the idolatry that was rampant in the land. He hastens to add thus **“saith Jehovah.”** His message was not of his own making, it was indeed, God given.

**“And I will stretch out my hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarim with the priests; and them that worship the hosts of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship, that swear to Jehovah and swear by Malcam; and them that are turned back from following Jehovah; and those that have not sought Jehovah, nor inquired after him” (1:4-6).** God announces that he will personally take charge of

the coming judgment. The primary purpose of the judgment will be to purge the nation of Judah of the corrupting idolatry into which they had fallen. Specifically he mentions:

1. **“The remnant of Baal.”** Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites whom the Hebrews displaced. He was the sun god and thought to be the god of procreation and good harvests. He was worshiped with vile rites of gluttony, drunkenness and ritual fornication. Baal worship was pure idolatry and strictly forbidden (Ex. 20:4-6).
2. **“The name of the Chemarim with the priests.”** The word **“chemarim”** means **“priest.”** That which is condemned are the unlawful priests who were looked to by the people. Some were priests of Baal and other heathen deities and some were the unapproved priests such as Jereboam I installed in Israel (I Kings 12:31).
3. **“Them that worship the host of heaven.”** Sinful man has always been allured by the sun, moon and stars. While rejecting the God who made them, they adore the creation and think that the heavenly orbs can somehow affect their lives. God strictly forbade the Hebrews from engaging in such worship (Deut. 4:19). Even in this well-educated scientific age, multitudes are still consulting their horoscopes.
4. **“Them that swear by to Jehovah and...Malcam.”** Malcam, sometimes called Milcom or Molech was the chief god of the wicked Ammonites. To him human sacrifices were offered (Jer. 32:35). In this verse he condemns their attempt to hold both the worship of Jehovah and that of Malcam. The blending of diverse and even contradictory religions is called **“syncretism.”** The surviving members of the Northern Kingdom intermarried with the idolatrous Gentiles sent there by the king of Assyria. **“They feared Jehovah, and served their own gods”** (II Kings 17:33). Elijah confronted this same problem. He challenged the people **“If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him”** (I Kings 18:21). The New Age religion of our day is thoroughly syncretic.
5. Godless apostates among the Hebrews are **“turned back from following Jehovah.”**

**“Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Jehovah; for the day of Jehovah is at hand: for Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath consecrated his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of Jehovah’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king’s sons, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. And in that day I will punish all those**

**that leap over the threshold, that fill their master's house with violence and deceit"** (1:7-9). In the presence of Almighty God, sinful men are expected to hold their peace and be silent (Hab. 2:20). There is no questioning God's decision, no arguing their case. Their only choice was to listen to His decree and accept it as just.

A sacrifice always involved the death of an animal. A portion of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar and the rest eaten by the priest and the one offering the sacrifice. As used by the prophet, God is going to sacrifice the wicked among his people Judah. He cites those with whom he has a just grievance.

1. Princes and king's sons and all who are clothed with foreign apparel. These were men who held high positions in government. To help his people remember that they belonged to Jehovah, God had prescribed that their apparel be marked with fringes of blue (Num. 15:38). The worldly among them chaffed at having to display the insignia of their religion, preferring the latest styles and fashions of the Gentile world. Many Christians have this same problem. They cast aside the modest apparel prescribed by Paul for the suggestive fashions of worldly designers.
2. Those who leap over the threshold. This alludes to a pagan superstition borrowed from the Philistines (I Sam. 5:5). From the day that their god Dagon fell before the ark of Jehovah, "neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon..." (I Sam. 5:5). It was a silly superstition borrowed from their pagan neighbors.
3. Those who fill their master's house with violence and deceit. This refers to those agents of the king or perhaps of other powerful men, who used violence and deceit to extort the wealth and possessions of the common folks for their masters. All of those mentioned above are on God's list of transgressors deserving special attention when he comes to judge the world.

**"And in that day, saith Jehovah, there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and a wailing from the second quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. Wail, ye inhabitants of Maktesh; for all the people of Canaan are undone; all they that were laden with silver are cut off"** (1:10-11). "That day" is the day of the Lord when the invading army appears. "The fish gate" was located in the northern wall of the city (II Chron. 33:14). It would be where the fish merchants would sell their goods. The "cry" would be of alarm at the approach of the destroying army. "The second quarter" was the

more recent extension to the city. It enlarged the walls to the north and west. From the new quarter of the city the citizens would see and hear the approach of the invading horde. **“The Maktesh”** was the likely the bazaar where the merchants who were laden with silver did their business. Maktesh literally means “mortar” but that does not help us in identifying the place. Sarcastically, he call the merchants **“the people of Canaan.”** The word canaanite means “merchant.” Canaanites would not likely have been allow to set up shop in the holy city. But the Jewish merchants were not much different than those of their Canaanite neighbors. We can imagine the fear and consternation that would sweep through the city’s population when they learned that an attack was immanent.

**“And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil. And their wealth shall become a spoil, and their houses a desolation: yea, they shall build houses, but shall not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but shall not drink the wine thereof”** (1:12-13). God forewarns the people that none can escape the coming judgment for he himself will **“search Jerusalem with lamps,”** finding and routing the wicked from their hiding places. This reminds us of Diogenes of Sinopes who walked through Athens with a lamp in hand. When asked what he was doing, he said he was looking for an honest man. God promises he will punish those who **“are settled on their lees...”** i.e., congealed in their wickedness. Lees are the solid particles in the wine that settles to the bottom of the container. The wine was left on the lees to improve its flavor. If left too long it caused the wine to sour. When the wine was to be used, it was strained to remove the lees. The people of Judah had tolerated sin and vice in their lives and it had corrupted the whole of their society. It had also hardened their hearts causing them to deny that God had any interest in their lives, be they good or evil, nor would he reward the good or punish the evil. This is a kind of “practical atheism” that manifests itself in the attitude of many who call themselves Christians. Zephaniah warns that their wealth will be taken as spoil by the invading soldiers. The fine homes they had built while ignoring God, they would not live to enjoy. Nor would they live to enjoy the wine their vineyards had produced.

**“The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of Jehovah; the mighty man crieth there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements”** (1:14-16). For the righteous, the day of the

Lord is a day of joy and happiness, a day of blessings and receiving rewards but for the wicked of Zephaniah's day it was the opposite. With poetic flourish he paints a dreary scene of a city overrun by a cruel enemy. God's wrath is poured upon them by the hands of the Babylonian army. The defending army will be routed. The civilians will be fleeing in terror. The city will be burning, the clouds of smoke ascending to the heavens. Amid the screams and chaos he hears the war trumpet signaling and directing the troops. It is indeed a mournful and pathetic picture he paints. The defensive walls and battlements had not been sufficient to withstand the punishment God had imposed on them.

**“And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Jehovah; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Jehovah's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he will make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the land” (1:17-18).** Their disaster is God's doing. In such chaos and confusion, a **blind** person cannot tell where he is or where he is going. He wanders aimlessly and so will the citizens of Jerusalem. Because of their great burden of sin, they will pay a fearful price. Violent death will overtake many of them. They will be slaughtered without pity by enemy soldiers. Their dead bodies will be left to rot like the **dung** heaps in a pasture. In their acquisition of wealth they had forgotten God. When the day of reckoning comes their gold and silver will not save them. They had ignored, despised and insulted their God and now “a terrible end” will overtake them.

### **Woe to Jerusalem and the Nations (2:1-3:7)**

**“Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation that hath no shame; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of Jehovah come upon you, before the day of Jehovah's anger come upon you” (2:1-2).** God is offering his people one final chance for repentance before their awful judgment strikes. Their sinfulness as a nation calls for national repentance. There once was a time when the leaders of our nation had sufficient faith in God and the Bible that they called for days of national fasting and prayer and seeking the blessings of Jehovah. Sadly such is no more.

Notice God refers to the inhabitants of Judah as a **“nation that hath no shame.”** The term “nation” is most often used to refer to heathen nations. At this point in their history, the Hebrews had sunken to the level of their heathen



neighbors. They were shameless in their conduct and in their neglect of God's will. Their time for repentance was short. We estimate that Zephaniah delivered his message about 620 B. C. The first Babylonian invasion occurred in 606/605 B. C. Puppet rulers were installed to do the bidding of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In two additional raids (597 and 587/586), the nation and God's temple were destroyed. Her people were deported to Babylon. Without genuine repentance, they would be as helpless before the coming judgment as chaff is to wind. Like the Assyrians, the Babylonians were instruments of judgment in God's hands (Is. 10:5-12).

**“Seek ye Jehovah, all ye meek of the earth, that have kept his ordinances; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye will be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger” (2:3).** In the midst of that rebellious population there were a few whom he describes as the meek of the earth. In other places they are called the “remnant” (Rom. 9:27). By remaining faithful through this tumultuous period, God would provide them a hiding place where they would be safe and spared.

### **Their Gentile Neighbors Will Suffer Along With Judah in the Coming Judgment (2:4-15).**

**“For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Askelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up. Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of Jehovah is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Philistines; I will destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea-coast shall be pastures, with cottages for shepherds and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed their flocks thereupon; in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening; for Jehovah their God will visit them and bring back their captivity” (2:4-7).** Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod and Ekron along with Gath were city states that had formed the Philistine League. They were hostile neighbors that for generations had been a thorn in the flesh of the Hebrews. David had subdued them so they were not a threat to the Hebrews in Zephaniah's day. Cherethites is another word identifying the Philistines (I Sam. 30:14; Ezek. 25:16). Part of David's body guard was staffed with Cherethites (II Sam. 8:18). His point in mentioning them is that Philistines to the west of Judea, Moabites and Ammonites to the east, Ethiopians to the South and Assyria to the north would all feel the chastening hand of God in the coming day of judgment. These heathen nations would be destroyed and not recover, whereas the Hebrews would survive their captivity and return to reclaim their land. This occurred in

536 when Cyrus, king of Persia decreed that all captive people in his nation could return to their homelands (Ezra 1:1-4).

**“I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, wherewith they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their borders. Therefore as I live, saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, a possession of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall make a prey of them, and the remnant of my nation shall inherit them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of Jehovah of hosts. Jehovah will be terrible unto them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the nations”** (2:8-11). The Moabites and Ammonites were descended from Lot by his two daughters. Their hostility toward the Hebrews burned incessantly. They were a wicked and aggressive people who tried repeatedly to encroach upon the territory of the Jews. He predicted that their judgment would be complete and final like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their homelands would become uninhabitable. When these heathen people reproached God’s people, they reproached Him and thus he avenges himself upon them.

Notice that this section ends with a remarkable prediction that in coming days, men of all nations will worship Jehovah from their place. In that day, there will be no more holy city, material temple or pilgrimages thereto. Jesus explained this truth to the woman of Samaria (John 4:19-26). In His Great Commission, he sent his Apostles to fulfill this prediction (Matt. 28:19).

**“Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like the wilderness. And herds shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the pelican and the porcupine shall lodge in the capitals thereof; their voice shall sing in the window; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he hath laid bare the cedar work. This is the joyous city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none besides me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! Everyone that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand”** (2:12-15). Far to the south, in the heart of Africa was Ethiopia. At this point in time, the Ethiopians controlled and ruled all of Egypt. So Egypt is included in this prediction. The first judgment on the Ethiopian/Egyptian kingdom was at the hands of Assyrian kings. Esarhaddon defeated Egypt in 672 B. C. In 664-663, Ashurbanipal returned to plunder the

land. At that time No-Amon, better known as Thebes, was taken and looted. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Egypt in 572 and again in 569/568 B.C. Ezekiel made a similar prediction about Nebuchadnezzar's punishment of Egypt (Ezek. 30:10).

The prophet now turns his attention to the north to the great Assyrian Empire whose capital was Nineveh. She would be utterly destroyed and flocks would graze where she once stood. The Babylonians, Medes and Scythians united to defeat and destroy Nineveh in 612 B. C. Its scattered ruins can still be seen in the land of Iraq, across the Tigris from the city of Mosul. The word rendered pelican is obscure in the Hebrew text. The RSV renders the passage, "the vulture and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; the owl shall hoot in the window, the raven croak on the threshold." The NIV renders it, "The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their calls will echo through the windows." Either of these makes more sense to the reader. Visitors who view the utter desolation of the city which formerly ruled the Middle-East, will sigh and wave their hands in dismay.

**"Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted! to the oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God. Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they leave nothing till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law"** (3:1-4). Zephaniah now turns his attention specifically to Jerusalem and her inhabitants. Like a prosecutor in a court, he lists the charges brought against her citizens.

1. They were **rebellious** which is worse than witchcraft (I Sam.15:23). Moses told the Hebrews of his day, "Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you" (Deut. 9:24).
2. They were **polluted**, defiled by their sins, thus unable to stand before their God (Jer. 3:2).
3. They **oppressed** those who were weak and unable to defend themselves. This their law specifically forbade (Deut. 24:14).
4. They **would not hear the voice of God** delivered through His Word, his faithful prophets and priests.
5. They **would not accept correction**.
6. They **trusted not Jehovah**.
7. They **would not draw near to God**. (See Jas. 4:8).

8. They were shameless (3:5).

These sins are not just relics of the ancient past. They flourish in our society today.

He then turns his attention to the leaders of the nation who had likewise miserably failed in their duties and responsibilities.

1. Her **princes** (the ruling class) **“are roaring lions.”** They were fierce predators who preyed on those they should have protected.
2. Her **judges** were like evening wolves, who under cover of darkness seek their victims.
3. Her **prophets** were light and treacherous persons. They were silly and irreverent in handling God’s Word.
4. Her **priests** profaned God’s sanctuary and did violence to the law. They neglected or took liberties in the observance of the rites of worship ordained by Jehovah. They failed to teach all of God’s will to the people or perhaps they added to it. They might have sought to soften or explain away its intended meaning.

**“Jehovah in the midst of her is righteous; he will not do iniquity; every mourning doth he bring his justice to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame”(3:5).** Jehovah was fully aware of their many sins for he was **“in the midst of her.”** Unlike her judges, he **“is righteous.”** **“He will not do iniquity.”** God is as dependable as the sun which never fails to appear. He will make the world to see and understand his righteous judgments.

**“I have cut off nations; their battlements are desolate; I have made their streets waste, so that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant. I said, Only fear thou me; receive correction; so her dwelling shall not be cut off, according to all that I have appointed concerning her: but they rose early and corrupted all their doings” (3:6-7).** God then reminds the Hebrews what he had done for them. He had broken the power of Egypt to free them from bondage. He gave them victory over the Canaanite tribes and gave them their land. His only stipulation was that they **“fear”** Him and **“receive correction.”** If that they would do they would never be driven from their land. He had made it clear that if they took up the wicked practices of the Canaanites, the land would vomit them out as it had done the heathen before them (Lev. 18:24-30). Rather than show their gratitude for God’s rich blessings, **“they rose early”** to indulge themselves in sin and rebellion.

## **A Promise of Future Blessings (3:8-20).**

Note: Passages such as the following have an immediate fulfillment in the restoration of the Hebrews from their captivity in Babylon. However, we can also see a glimmer of a greater, grander fulfillment that would be realized in the heavenly kingdom of Messiah which was to come hundreds of years later.

**“Therefore wait ye for me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (3:8).** The word **“therefore”** connects this section with the foregoing. Having identified the many sins of the Hebrews that were deserving of God’s punishment, he now turns his attention to the righteous remnant among them. They are urged to **“wait...for me, saith Jehovah.”** While they could not escape the turmoil that the day of the Lord would bring, they should not despair, rather, they should trust Him and be patient as He did his work of purifying their nation. This exhortation is yet valid for Christians in our troubled age of degeneracy and violence. Isaiah also knew the value of waiting for the Lord. **“They that wait for (God) shall not be put to shame” (Is. 49:23).** **“They that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength” (Is. 40:31).** **“The prey”** which God will take are the wicked nations upon whom he will pour his indignation and fierce anger. **“All the earth”** is not to be taken literally. It is a metonymy, the whole standing for a part. He speaks of all those nations under consideration, those already mentioned in chapter two.

Our God is a jealous God (Ex. 34:14). God’s **jealousy** is not to be confused with the petty jealousy common to man. We are often jealous when there is no good reason to be so. In our ignorance and vanity we imagine that our loved one or friend is turning away from us, when in reality they are not. God is omniscient. He knows every detail of their hearts and ours. His jealousy stirred when his people turned to other gods, when their affections turned from Him to other people or things. His jealousy is aroused when human beings, whom he created to honor his name, dishonor it; when they abuse and misuse the things he created. He is jealous when evil people seek to harm his saints. In this passage hostile nations had laid violent hands upon his people and God’s jealousy is stirred to avenge them.

**“For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent” (3:9).** The prophet does not have in mind a particular language such as Greek or Latin. He means that following the refinement of the coming judgment, their speech

will be pure; forgiven and cleansed of all haughtiness (3:11) lies and deceit (3:13). “Then will I purify the lips of the peoples” (NIV). The ultimate goal is that **“they all may call upon the name of Jehovah...with one consent.”**

**“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. In that day shalt thou not be put to shame for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me; for then I will take away out of the midst of thee thy proudly exulting ones, and thou shalt no more be haughty in my holy mountain”** (3:10-11). He continues the promise of the good things to come after the day of the Lord, which in this case was the coming Babylonian Captivity (606-536 B. C.). He sees his fellow-Hebrews, who had been scattered far and wide by war or sold as slaves, returning to the holy land as faithful “suppliants,” worshiping God and bringing their offerings to Him. In Zephaniah’s day, Ethiopia was the end of the earth as far as human knowledge was concerned. They knew not what lay beyond its southern border. His point is, no matter how far God’s people had been scattered, the day would come when they would be free to come home and they would desire to do so. Their sins, such as pride, that had brought God’s judgment upon them, will have been purged and forgiven. Now with new-found humility they will come and worship him.

**“But I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall take refuge in the name of Jehovah. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid”** (3:12-13). The haughty ones mentioned in vs. 11, will have been purged out, but left in God’s kingdom will be those **“afflicted and poor people...(who) take refuge in the name of Jehovah.”** Because all deceit and lies have been purged from their hearts, they will be a people of pure speech. They are his righteous remnant. There was never a time when all of Abraham’s descendants were faithful to God, but there was always a faithful remnant who served Him. This theme is found scattered though the pages of Scripture. “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt.22:14). Thus Paul concluded, “If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved” (Rom. 9:27). (For an extended discussion on **God’s Remnant**, see the Appendix at the end of Zephaniah. To understand **“they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid,”** think of a flock of sheep who are cared for by a good shepherd. Jehovah was their shepherd, Jesus is ours (John 10:9).

**“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments,**

**he hath cast out thine enemy: the King of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not fear evil any more” (3:14-15).** In view these wonderful promises of a blessed future, the prophet exhorts them to celebrate their deliverance and blessings. In verse 12 we see a good illustration of the parallelism common in Hebrew poetry:

**“Sing, O daughter of Zion**

**Shout, O Israel,**

**Be glad and rejoice...O daughter of Jerusalem”**

This example is called a synonymous parallel. In each line the people are told to rejoice. Zion, Israel and daughter of Jerusalem all refer to the citizens of Jerusalem. Until the student has some knowledge of the use of parallelisms by the Hebrew writers, he will be hard-pressed to fully understand their poetry. (Those wishing to study the subject more will profit from the book **Hermeneutics** by D. R. Dungan, Gospel Light Pub. Co.). They were to rejoice because their God had removed their judgment by casting out their enemy. In this case he speaks of the Babylonians who had decimated their land. When they would return after their captivity, God would be **“in the midst”** of them as in the days of old. God’s presence was in their midst, in the holy of holies of their temple (Ps. 46:4-5). Today, our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (I Cor. 6:18-19). This should fill us with overflowing joy.

**“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; O Zion, let not thy hands be slack. Jehovah thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing” (3:16-17).** The exhortation to Jerusalem, **“let not thy hands be slack”** is meant to encourage those who returned from captivity to devote themselves to rebuilding Jerusalem and the holy temple. The history of that era can be found in Ezra and Nehemiah. Haggai, the prophet, devoted himself to seeing God’s temple rebuilt. It is remarkable that Zephaniah depicts God as singing over his blessed people with joy and love. This reminds us of a loving parent doting over their child.

**“I will gather them that sorrow for the solemn assembly, who were of thee; to whom the burden upon her was a reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all them that afflict thee; and I will save that which is lame, and gather that which was driven away; and I will make them a praise and a name, whose shame hath been in all the earth” (3:18-19).** With the decree of king Cyrus that the captives could return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-2), a steady stream of those Jews who had been scattered to the four

winds began making their way back to their homeland. As in our day, some no doubt went home from reasons of love and loyalty to God and the land of their fathers. Others fled there for sanctuary because of their enemies. God again is pictured as the good shepherd calling them, guiding them, protecting them from their oppressors. We see him gently caring for the lame. That they were people who **“sorrow for the solemn assembly,”** tells us they longed to be able to go to Jerusalem to celebration the solemn assembly of Atonement and those joyful days of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. That such was in their hearts demonstrates that they were of God’s righteous remnant. God promises to take care of their enemies who might try to hinder or harm them. As a defeated and enslaved people, they had been subjected to **shame** and ridicule. Restored to their homeland, people would be forced to see them as a people blessed by their God.

**“At that time will I bring you in, and at that time will I gather you; for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring back your captivity before your eyes, saith Jehovah” (3:20).** In this closing verse, the prophet makes it crystal clear that God was promising the righteous within the Hebrew nation, that after the captivity which he had promised, He would bring them back safely to their homeland. This provided consolation for those who would live to experience the awful judgments of the coming day of the Lord.

### **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- There are two sides to the personality of God: mercy and goodness for those who submit to him and strict justice and terrible judgment against those who rebel against him (Rom. 11:22).
- A man’s belief about God will greatly influence his conduct (Prov. 23:7).
- It is universally true that one tends to become like the God he worships.
- The wrath of God is a terrible thing when it is unleashed against a sinful people.
- Earnest, daily warning is sorely needed to draw us back to the paths of God (Amos 4:12).
- The day of Jehovah is inevitable for all men of every race, nation and station of life.
- God’s eternal plan was that salvation be offered to every person in every nation of the earth.



- **Those who malign and fight against God's people shall suffer the wrath of God.**
- **The great causes of God and humanity are not defeated by frontal attacks by Satan, but by the crushing indifference of the masses of people.**
- **God's ministers should put strong emphasis upon the spiritual nature of God's kingdom.**
- **God gives assurance that the humble ones who seek him will be safe in his presence in the day of judgment (2:3).**
- **The promise that joy will displace mourning and that tranquility will follow the storm, should bring encouragement to the righteous.**
- **The wicked cannot hope to hide or escape the day of Jehovah (Ps. 139:7-12).**
- **Neither riches, wealth nor honor will save one in the day of judgment.**
- **God's purpose is not to wreak vengeance and destroy, but to cleanse and refine and saved those who will allow him to save them (II Pet. 3:9).**
- **You should not procrastinate, but flee now to the place of refuge, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah comes.**

# APPENDIX

## GOD'S REMNANT

A central theme of the Scriptures is that God has always had a faithful few in the earth who serve him. This small group is frequently described as the **remnant**. Paul wrote that, "If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved" (Rom. 9:27). The word **remnant** means, "a small fragment: an end of a roll of cloth; of good quality but small; a surviving trace." This aptly describes God's faithful people.

- I. In ancient times, God always had his remnant. In Noah's generation the remnant numbered only eight souls (Gen. 6:5-10). In the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot and his family composed the remnant (II Pet. 2:6-7). Among the two-three million Hebrews who exited Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb of the men of war were faithful to God (Num. 14:29-30)
- II. The prophet's hope for the future of Israel was in the remnant. Elijah was made to understand that in Israel's darkest day God yet had seven thousand faithful servants (I Kings 13:18). Isaiah thanked God for saving a very small remnant (Is. 1:9). The Lord promised Jeremiah that a remnant would be saved from Babylon and restored to the homeland (Jer. 23:3). Ezekiel consoled the refugees in captivity with word that a remnant would survive to carry the faith onward (Ezek. 6:8). Amos assured his brethren that God would "be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15).
- III. Jesus taught that only a remnant would be saved in the Day of Judgment. "Many are called, but few chosen," said he (Matt. 22:14). "For narrow is the gate, and straightened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. 7:14). On one occasion He said to his followers, "Fear not, **little flock**: for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).
- IV. Paul saw the concept of the remnant as a logical explanation of why the majority of the Jews were rejecting the gospel. He argued, "But it is not as though the word of God hath come to naught for they are not all Israel that are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, they all children;

but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God: but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed” (Rom. 9:6-8). Of Abraham’s fourteen children only Isaac was “of the promise.” Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom.11:15).

- V. What does the doctrine of the remnant mean for us today?
- A. We must not expect everyone to follow Jesus. They never have. God does not expect it. Thus we must not allow ourselves to become discouraged when folks reject the gospel. A small congregation is not proof of failure. It may well be the faithful remnant at work for the Master.
  - B. We should not expect everyone who makes a public confession to be wholly committed to Christ till death. There will always be backsliders and deserters. Our converts will suffer a similar attrition even as Paul’s did (II Tim. 4:10). Of course, we try to salvage all of them. Never would we push a soul away, but when the disappointment comes we must not be overwhelmed.
  - C. It is the faithful few who always have and always will carry the cause forward. Some preachers complain that 15% of their flock do 90% of the work and give the bulk of the contributions. Thank God for that faithful few. They are God’s remnant. They are the hope of the world.
  - D. No one is predestined or programmed to be a part of the remnant. It is a matter of personal conviction based on teaching and guidance. We cannot make a new convert “long for the spiritual milk....that (they) may grow thereby unto salvation” (I Pet. 2:2). We can only **teach** them to observe all things that Christ commanded (Matt.28:20). While we must try to restore those who fall (Gal. 6:1), it is they themselves who must “give the more diligence to make their calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10).
  - E. In many cases, only God knows if a brother or sister is part of the remnant. We can only look at the outward man; God looks into the heart (I Sam. 16:7). He can discern both the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). A faithful sister became a serious troublemaker in her family and the congregation. To us it looked as if she had become unfaithful. A few months later she died with a brain tumor. She had not been responsible for her actions. We must not make the mistake of judging our brother (Jas. 4:11-12). If he meets those basic

requirements for fellowship we must accept him and let the all-wise Judge decide his destiny.

- F. Each Christian should daily examine himself to be sure of his own standing with God (II Cor. 13:5). Never take your own faithfulness for granted (I Cor. 11:28). Even a great saint like Paul knew he could be rejected if he neglected his spiritual life (I Cor. 9:27). “Unto death” is the Biblical requirement for faithfulness (Rev. 2:10).

The church in Sardis was woefully dead. Yet there were a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with Jesus in white; for they are worthy (Rev. 3:4). Let it be our continual goal and concern to be a part of God’s faithful few who serve him now and who will be with him in heaven.

## HAGGAI : THE TEMPLE BUILDER

The tenth of the Minor Prophets is Haggai, a man with a mission and the determination to see the job accomplished.

### About the Author

The author is “**Haggai the prophet,**” i.e., the spokesman for God (See Exodus 7:1 and 4:15-16). All we know about Haggai is revealed in his small book and brief notices about him in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. His name means “festive or festival.” It is comparable to the Latin name Festus. He may have been born on a festival day and so was named.

Haggai had been in exile with his fellow Hebrews in the land of Babylon. He was among the faithful remnant that returned in 536 B.C. On the basis of 2:3, it is thought by some that he was an old man who had seen Solomon’s Temple before it was destroyed. Because of his boundless energy and determination, someone has dubbed Haggai “a steam engine in trousers.”

As a preacher, Haggai was not a polished speaker, rather, he was plain spoken, blunt, and of few words. He spoke with a “thus saith the Lord,” thus he was a truly God’s messenger. Haggai was an exhorter. He was one of those rare persons who could motivate people to do great things in the face of incredible hardships. Not only did he rebuke his hearers, he cheered commended and encouraged them as well. The one obsession of the prophet’s life was to get God’s temple rebuilt. He had the vision to look beyond the rubble of the ruined city and see the hope of tomorrow’s finished work. He not only preached to others, he put his hand to the task as well (Ezra 5:1-2). He was blest with a “remarkable genius for organization and a capacity for getting things done.” He saw the duty at hand and dedicated himself to seeing it completed. He was great because he was strong in faith and optimistic in hope. His priorities were straight. God’s work must come first (Matt. 6:33).

Haggai was the first prophet of the restoration period when the Hebrews returned from Babylonian captivity. His contemporaries were Zechariah the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest of Judah.

## The Historical Background

Cyrus the Great became master of the Fertile Crescent in 538, B. C., when Babylon fell. At Cyrus's death in 529 B.C., his son Cambyses, took the throne. He was a cruel and dissolute ruler. In 522, Cambyses died (some think it was suicide) and Darius, son of Hystaspes, became king. Darius was challenged by a usurper known in history as Pseudo-Smerdis who held the throne of Persia for seven months before being killed. In 521, insurrections broke out all over the empire. Twenty-three provinces rebelled. Darius fought nineteen battles to preserve his kingdom.

A **chronology** of Haggai's ministry will be helpful for our study.

- In 536 B.C., Cyrus issued his proclamation allowing all captive people to return to their ancestral homes (Ezra 1:1-4). Some 42,360 Hebrews set out for the land of Judah (Ezra 2:1,64).
- In the seventh month, October of 536, God's altar was erected and sacrifices were offered. The Feast of Tabernacles was observed (Ezra 3:1-4).
- In the second month of 535 the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-10). Hostile opposition from the neighboring Samaritans forced the construction to halt. From 535-520 no work was done (Ezra 4:1-24) .
- In the year 520, Haggai and Zechariah, through their preaching and leadership, stirred the Hebrews to resume work of the building God's house.
- Haggai's first prophecy was delivered in September (Hag. 1:1-11).
- A month later his second message was presented (Hag. 2:1-9).
- In November of 520, Zechariah brought forth his first prophecy (Zech. 1:1-6).
- In December, Haggai's third and fourth oracles were spoken (Hag. 2:10-23).
- In January of 519, Zechariah delivered his second lesson (1:7-6:15).
- In November of that year his third message was given (7:1-8:23).
- The temple was completed in March of 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

The leadership of the struggling nation rested upon two righteous men. **Zerubbabel**, the son of Shealtiel, was governor under the Persian overlords (Hag. 1:1). He was a direct descendent from David and Jechoniah, the last king of Judah prior to the captivity (Matt. 1:11-12). Zerubbabel is thought to be the Sheshbazzar of Ezra of 1:8-10. (Compare Ezra 2:1-2). **Joshua**, the son

of Jehozadak, was high priest (Hag. 1:1). He was descended from the last high priest, Seraiah. Sometimes Joshua is referred to as Jeshua (Hag. 3:2). At the time Haggai began his work, Joshua and the priesthood were ceremonially defiled and thus disqualified for God's service (Zech. 3:1-10).

The **situation in Judah** was pathetic. God's temple lay in ruins. Only the altar had been erected (1:4). The people, being blocked in their efforts to rebuild God's house, had busied themselves in building their own homes. They now had comfortable "ceiled houses," i.e., they were paneled with wood (1:4). Over those 16 years of inactivity they had lost their concern for God's house. Perhaps during the seventy long years of exile in Babylon, they had adjusted to worshipping without the temple. A new generation had grown up that had never seen the old temple, and thus did not realize the extent of their loss. Disillusionment over their ruined cities, hostile neighbors and general hardships had discouraged them. Crop failures and serious economic problems were plaguing them. Their personal interest in building their own homes and in getting their businesses and farms going had overshadowed their responsibility to God. There may have been the feeling that the realities of the restoration had not measured up to the glowing predictions delivered by Isaiah (See Isaiah 35:1-10 and 40:1-11). Some may have argued that God wanted the temple to be ruined for a full seventy years (See Jeremiah 29:10-11).

The great majority of the Hebrews had chosen to remain in Babylon. Only 42,360, plus 7,337 servants came back in the first migration (Ezra 2:64-65). It is to their credit that those who stayed behind did send financial help (Ezra 1:5-6). The returnees faced massive economic hardships. This little nation would have qualified for "disaster relief" (Hag 1:6, 10-11). Haggai was faced with lack of concern, despondency, unbelief, apathy and moral insensibility as he began his work. To fully understand Haggai's book a good student will first read (Ezra 1:1-6:16).

### **About the Book**

The book bears the name of its inspired author. In the Septuagint it is called "Aggaios." In the Latin Vulgate it is "Aggaeus."

The **literary style** of the book is interesting. It is "pathetic in exhortation, vehement in reproofs, elevated in contemplating the glorious future" (J. Wolfendale). His words are plain, concise, earnest, impressive. They were just what was needed for the occasion. Haggai was fond of using interrogations (Compare 1:4, 9; 2:3, 12). One is impressed by the absence of denunciation of idolatry, immorality or social injustice. Most likely, his book is composed

of excerpts from his notable lessons delivered in the time frame under consideration.

The book of Haggai is **self-dating**. It consists of four oracles dated between the last week of August and the first week of December 520 B.C. (1:1, 2:10). Few ancient books are so precisely dated.

The book was first written for the remnant of Jews living in Jerusalem following their return from Babylonian captivity. It has blessed Jews and Christians to this date.

Haggai's **purpose** was one: to get the temple rebuilt. He had no call for repentance; no denunciation of social injustice or sin; no strong ethical or spiritual lessons. To accomplish his goal, he rebuked (1:1-10); encouraged (2:1-9), and exhorted (2:10-19).

Haggai has suffered at the hands of liberal scholars. Oesterly and Robinson are typical of the sinful arrogance of such men. They write, "he can have no place among the prophets in the sense of the word." For a refutation of these assaults, see **An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets** by Hobart Freeman.

### **Some Miscellaneous Facts about the Book**

The Hebrew text of Haggai is well preserved. In the New Testament, Hebrews 12:26-28 contains a clear allusion to (Hag. 2:6-7). "I will shake all nations." Haggai is one of the smallest books of the Old Testament, containing only thirty-eight verses.

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are generally classified as the **post-exilic prophets** since they served after the Babylonian captivity. According to the Jewish Talmud, these three prophets were all members of the Great Synagogue, later to be known as the Sanhedrin.

It is of interest to note that seventy years passed from the first Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 606 B.C. to the first return in 536. Seventy years also elapsed from the destruction of the temple in 586 to its completion in 516/515 B.C.

Concerning the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar's troops, we read in II Kings 25:9 that it was burned, not demolished. This would explain why so few could do the work of rebuilding in only four years. The original temple built by Solomon was seven years in construction. Employed in the project were 153,300 workmen (1 Kings 5:15-16; 6:37-38). The prophet speaks of houses ceiled with cedar (1:4). In Judea, stone was



cheap, wood a luxury. If they could line the interior of their houses with wood, they were not so poor as they pretended.

Their rebuilt temple was as nothing compared to Solomon's (2:3). Their lack of wealth and workers made it impossible to restore the temple to its former grandeur. The ark of the covenant with its contents was lost and there is no historical evidence that the *shekinah* actually filled their temple.

Haggai was standing on the promises of God. Ten times God repeated his promises to him: "I will take pleasure in it" (1:8). "I will be glorified" (1:8). "I am with you" (1:13). "I will bless you" (2:19) etc.

Jewish rabbis attributed some of the Psalms to Haggai, as did the early church fathers. In the Vulgate he is credited with (Ps:111); in the Septuagint with Pss. 137,146,147,148: and in the Peshitta with Ps. 145.

Haggai's success in seeing the temple rebuilt won him a place among the founders of post-exilic Judaism.

Our prophet has made a strong impression on scholars over the years. "A prophet's historical magnitude is measured, not by the literary splendor of his style, but by the work that he accomplished" (Elmslie). "No other prophet ..... is more discreet in his purpose, so pungent in his criticism, and yet so adept at reaching the object aimed at..." (Ward).

### **Keys that Unlock Haggai's Message**

The key verses of Haggai are two:

1:8, "Go..... and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah." 2:9, "The latter glory of this house; shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah."

The **key word** is "consider" which is used in 1:5, 7; 2: 15, 18.

The **key phrases** are "saith Jehovah" or similar terms which are used 26 times in his 38 verses and "I am with you saith Jehovah" used in 1:13 and 2:4. The **key concept** is that God must be first in our lives.

### **A Simple Summary of the Book**

I. Divine Reproof (1:1-15)

II. Divine Remedy (2:1-9)

III . Divine Explanation (2:10-19)

IV. Divine Encouragement (2:20-23)

### Exposition

Verse one identifies the author and dates the book. The sixth month of Darius would have been September of 520 B.C. Darius was the third of the mighty Persian monarchs who ruled the Fertile Crescent. The writer assures us that though he spoke and then wrote the message, it was “the word of Jehovah” which had been given unto him. If the prophet were truly sent by heaven, God would put his words into his mouth (Jer.1:9). The man would then speak Gods word “faithfully” (Jer. 23:28), not substituting or including his own thoughts or ideas.

The message was delivered first to Zerubbabel, the governor and Joshua the high priest, the leaders of the small nation. See the introductory notes for more information on these two men.

### A Rebuke and a Call to Action (1:2-15)

The people said, “**It is not the time for Jehovah’s house to be built**” (vs. 2). This statement sets forth the problem with which Haggai had to deal. Jehovah’s house lay in ruins and the people sought to justify the situation by saying that the time was not yet come to rebuild it. It is possible that they were taking Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years of captivity in Babylon to mean that God wanted his temple to be ruined for seventy years (Compare Jer. 25:1-12; 29:10). The temple had been destroyed in 586 B.C. It was 520 when the prophet wrote, hence some may have thought they should wait another four years.

Verses 3-4 are a rebuke to the people from Jehovah through Haggai. He asked them, “**Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in you ceiled houses, while this house (God’s temple ) lieth waste?**” Their “ceiled houses” were likely wainscoted with cedar (see 1 Kings 7:6-7 and Jeremiah 22:14). In Judea, stone was cheap and wood a luxury. If they could line the interior of their houses with wood, they were not as poor so they pretended. He rebuked their words of excuse (that “it is not time to build”) and turned them on the speakers, by asking how then is it time to build you own expensive dwellings? He thus exposed their hypocrisy and hollow excuses.

Verses 5-6 are a call for the Hebrews to consider their ways, i.e., “take a hard look at yourselves” They were in a grip of an economic depression described thusly:

**“Ye have sown much (seed) and bring in little (harvest);**

**Ye eat, but ye have not enough;**

**Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink;**

**Ye clothe you, but none is warm; and**

**He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”**

The money bag with a hole in it is not to be interpreted literally, rather it refers figuratively to rampant inflation which was as bad as actually losing one's money. The charge to “consider this” means, ask yourselves why is this happening? What does it mean?

Verses 7-8 are a charge to get started rebuilding God's temple. Again he says, **“Consider your ways.”** In this verse the application of the exhortation is that they consider their duty to God to build his house. **“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house (temple); and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah.”**

The command is plain and straight forward, get to work and build the temple, now! God's favor is promised if they will obey the charge.

Verses 9-11 provide an explanation of their hardships. **“Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith Jehovah of hosts. Because of my house lieth waste, while ye run every man to his own house”** (1:9). They had returned home from Babylon with high expectations of economic prosperity; but crop failure and economic hardship was the harsh reality. Up to this point they had attributed their problems to natural causes. Haggai explains that it was a judgment of God for their neglect of his house. That God **“blew upon it”** means that what little they managed to accumulate was soon dissipated as wind scatters the chaff on the threshing floor. That each man ran to his own house means that they were so busy with their personal affairs that they had no time for the things of God.

Verses 10-11 explain that the drought and corresponding crop failures were directly tied to their neglect of the temple. **“Therefore”** draws a conclusion from the foregoing words. Furthermore he declares that God had taken a personal hand in ordering their hardships as a punishment for their sin.

Verses 12-15 relate how the people responded to the prophet's message. Led by Zerubbabel and Joshua, all the people **“obeyed the voice of God, and the words of Haggai the prophet.”** This passage teaches that when we heed the teaching of God's teacher, who faithfully delivers the divine message, we are obeying God. In the words of Christ, “He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me...” (John 13:20). It is worth noting that all the people obeyed God and began to work on God's house. None are so great or important that they are excused from obedience and participation in the Master's Cause.

Haggai cheered the workers on by conveying Jehovah's blessing unto them. **“I am with you, saith Jehovah”** (1:13). What greater blessing could one ask than that God be with him?

**“And Jehovah stirred the spirit of Zerubbabel....Joshua....and of all the remnant ...”** (1:14). He had also stirred the spirit of Cyrus to let the Hebrews return home and of the people who accepted the opportunity to go (Ezra 1:1, 5). We are not told just how God stirred them, but we can be sure it involved the preaching leadership of his messenger, Haggai. Ezekiel prophesied over the dry bones of the Jewish nation to revive them (Ezek. 37:4-5). Paul says that prophesying edifies, exhorts, and consoles (1 Cor. 14:3). God still places great value on the preaching of his Word (1 Cor. 1:21; 11 Tim. 4:1-2).

Haggai's message was delivered on the first day of the sixth month. By the twenty-fourth day they were at work. The intervening days were evidently used for preparation for the project.

### **Encouragement in the Face of Disappointment (2:1-9)**

Haggai's second message came on the twenty-first day of the seventh month. This is the month Tishri and is comparable to our October and November. The date would have been the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a major festival day for the Hebrews (Lev. 22:33-43).

The temple construction had been underway some three and a half weeks. Evidently the older members of the community who had seen Solomon's splendid temple, before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it, were bemoaning the fact that their new house was inferior to the former one.

The prophet asks them, **“Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes as nothing?”** (2:3). Ezra records that at the laying of the foundation back in 535, “the old men that had seen the first house...wept with a loud voice” (Ezra 3:12). Times were hard. Given the smallness of their numbers and financial

strength, we can understand their discouragement. God speaks of **“this house,”** singular. Three temples were built: Solomon’s...Zerubbabel’s and Herod’s, yet the Lord saw them as a continuity.

Sensing their need for encouragement, God’s spokesman urged them, **“Yet now be strong...and work...for I am with you, saith Jehovah....according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit abode among you: fear not”** (2: 4-5).

Haggai conceded the limitations of the new building, but exhorted them to work on because God was pleased with the work they were doing. He will accept their temple and all the covenant promises of the past will be honored. At Sinai, God had promised that Israel would be his “own possession from among all peoples...” and that they would be unto him “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6). Also he promised to “dwell among” the children of Israel, and...be their God (Ex. 29:45). God’s presence in their midst was evidenced by the *shekinah*, the great shining light, that led them out of Egypt and later dwelt in their temple (Ex. 13:21-22). Ezekiel had seen the “glory of Jehovah” depart from Jerusalem because of their sin and idolatry. That allowed God to deliver the city, its inhabitants and his temple over to the Babylonians (Ezek. 9:18-19). In Chapter 43:1-7 Ezekiel saw the *shekinah* returning to the future temple.

In verses 2:6-8 God promises the workers that he will supply them adequate provisions to complete their task. **“Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations; and the precious things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory”** (2:6-7). These difficult lines are easily understood if we carefully note the parallelisms and compare them with Zechariah. The parallel is cumulative in nature: God will shake the heavens and the earth, the seas and the dry land all the nations.

The result of shaking all the nations will be the needed funds to rebuild his temple. Zechariah explained that God is unhappy with the heathen nations that had afflicted his people (Zech. 1:15). He would cut off their horns, i.e., their power (Zech. 1:20-22), and take their possessions and give them as spoils to Israel (Zech. 2:7-9). This interpretation is verified by comparing Habakkuk 2:20 when in yet another prediction God says: “I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms ...” The parallel lines show that what was to be shaken was the

governments of the heathen nations. The writer of Hebrews borrows these words and uses them in another context in (Heb. 12:27-28).

The words **“yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake....”** (2:6), have posed a problem for most commentators. **The Amplified Bible** seems to capture the correct meaning, **“Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake...”** God had recently shaken the mighty Babylonian empire bringing it crashing to the ground by the hands of the Medes and Persians. Now he promises to do more shaking of the nations in order to accomplish his will for Israel. From our introductory study we recall that Darius was challenged for the throne by a usurper known as Pseudo-Smerdis. In 521 B.C., just months after Haggai prophesied, insurrection broke out in twenty-three Persian provinces. Darius fought nineteen battles in order to secure his position as ruler.

**“The precious things of all nations”** (vs. 7) would be their resources which would be used to build Jehovah’s house. Gifts for construction came from Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1:5-11). Darius (Ezra 6:5-13). Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12-26) and other Gentiles (II Maccabees 3:3).

The King James translators rendered verse 7, **“the desire of all nations shall come.”** This has traditionally been interpreted to be a messianic prophecy. Their translation followed understanding of the Jewish rabbis and Jerome. See E. B. Pusey’s commentary for this view. Theo Laetsch correctly observes, **“The ‘desire’ (Gr. N) cannot refer to Christ as the Desire of the nations, since the predicate is plural.”**

**“The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of host”** (2:8). The prophet assures the Hebrews they need not worry about the means necessary to build their temple. God would supply every need from his bountiful store (Ps. 24:1: 50:10-12).

**“The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace....”** (2:9). Solomon’s grand temple was resplendent with material glory (I Kings 6-7). Zerubbabel’s was as nothing compared to it. To encourage them, God promises that, in a future day, the glory of temple would exceed that of Solomon’s. It is almost universally conceded that the greater glory refers to the presence of God’s Son in the later temple, during his earthly sojourn. Solomon’s temple had the *shekinah*, the symbol of God’s presence. In the future, the Word of God who would be incarnated would walk and teach in Herod’s temple. That glory, he predicts, will be greater than that of Solomon’s temple, not only in degree, but also in kind (Ebenezer Henderson). Homer Hailey understands this to extend beyond the material temple in Jerusalem to Christ’s church which is God’s spiritual temple

(Compare Ephesians 2:15-22; I Corinthians 3:16). The probability of this is seen by comparing Habakkuk 2:9 and Ephesians 2:15-16).

1. **“in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah....”** (Haggai 2:9).

2. **“.....that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace....and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh....”** (Eph. 2:15-16).

### **An Appeal to Conscience and a Call to Patience (2:10-19).**

**“In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah...”** (2:10). Haggai’s third message came exactly three months after the people had begun their work on the temple. The ninth month of the Jewish Calendar is Chislev and corresponds with our November/December. God’s response in bestowing temporal blessings for their efforts had been slow in coming. Doubtless this had discouraged some or it had become an occasion of complaint. The prophet now explains why this has been so and announces that a new day of blessing has arrived. He begins by asking two questions.

**“Thus saith Jehovah, ask now the priests concerning the law...”** (vs. 11). His questions were rightly addressed to the priests for it was their duty to **“make a distinction between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean...”** (Lev. 10:10).

1. **“If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any food shall it become holy? And the priests answered and said, No”** (2:12).

**“If one bear”** proposed a hypothetical question. We might ask, **“Suppose one should bear...”**

**“Holy flesh”** was the flesh of animals slain for sacrifices to the Lord.

**“The skirt of his garment”** literally means **“the wing, the border or corner, of his garment.....”** (Laetsch). The question is two fold, if in performing his sacred duties the priest’s garment should touch the sacrificial meat is it made holy thereby? The answer to the first query is Yes. **“Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy....”** (Lev. 6:27). The second part of the question is, **“If that skirt made holy by touching the sacrifice should then touch other food such as bread, pottage or wine would that holiness be transmitted?”** The answer of the priest was a definite No.

2. **“Then said Haggai. If one that is unclean by reason of a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.”** The law was clear, anyone or anything that touched a dead body or anything associated therewith became unclean (Num. 6:6; 19:22). The law of defilement attached to dead bodies probably was based upon the idea that death was polluting because it was the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20).

The points forcibly drawn from these two questions are that holiness is not contagious while sin is. The application is then made by the prophet: **“So is this people; and so is this nation before me, saith Jehovah; and so is every work of their hands: and that which they offer there is unclean”** (2:14). The Hebrews had a serious flaw in their thinking. They thought that having an altar and sacrifices were enough to make their lives acceptable to God. The point made through these questions is that, **“Israel is utterly unclean on account of its neglect of the house of Jehovah”** (Keil). **“It is polluted in itself, like the man who is “unclean by a dead body, through its disobedience, and neglect of the temple”** (T.T. Perowne). Their altar, **“so far from hallowing the land or people by the sacrifices offered thereon, was itself defiled”** (E. B. Pusey). The application is implied but not stated. **“The worship on the altar which they observed, while they neglected the building of the temple, did not hallow. The possession of a holy thing does not counter balance disobedience”** (Pusey). **“Whatever the Jews might otherwise rightly perform, would not compensate for their neglect in building the temple”** (Henderson).

It is noteworthy that he called the Hebrews, **“this nation”** (2:14) since this is a term most generally used to refer to heathen people who were not pleasing to him.

Their sin in neglecting God’s house had brought them penalties. **“...consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah. Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty vessels, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the work of your hands; yet ye turned not to me saith Jehovah”** (2:15-17). For sixteen years they had neglected the completion of God’s house and for sixteen years hard times had been upon them. There were shortages in food such as grain and wine. Crops had been ruined by blasting, mildew and hail. **“Blasting”** was the result of the scorching east winds that blow in from the desert, destroying the vegetation. Mildew was a blight that left crops lifeless and fruitless. God tells them bluntly that he sent these disasters as a just penalty for their sins. The intent was to move them



to repentance, yet for sixteen years, **“ye turned not to me, saith Jehovah”** (2:17). They had missed the purpose of their discipline. Verse 17 is borrowed in large part from Amos, a prophet of an earlier age (Compare Amos 4:9).

Now that they had finally shown their willingness to obey God in the matter of rebuilding his temple, things would change. **“Consider, I pray you, from this day and backward, ... since the day that the foundation of Jehovah’s temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree have not brought forth; from this day I will bless you”** (2:18-19). The point made is to look at your experience and learn the lesson intended. No obedience means no blessing. Now you are obeying God; now you will be blest. How surely this lesson is needed in our age of nominal Christianity!

### **David’s Dynasty Will be Restored (2:20-23)**

**“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens an the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of the kingdoms; and I will destroy the strength of the kingdom of the nations and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother”** (2:20-22). This revelation came on the same day as the previous message. The purpose of this was to assure them of their survival in the midst of a stormy political environment of war and violence. Little though they were, they would prevail because the mighty Jehovah was their protector. The shaking of the heavens is but a poetic way of saying, “I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations” (2:22). Their mighty armies would be destroyed by internal strife as Jehovah directed. So were the armies of the Midianites destroyed in Gideon’s day (Judg. 7:22).

**“In that day saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee....”** (vs. 23). Zerubbabel, the governor of the struggling nation, is singled out for honor and recognition by the Lord. This could have been in part for his faithfulness in leading the people in rebuilding the Lord’s house. More importantly, he was a descendant of David and God was now renewing the messianic promises made to David (II Sam. 7:11-14). They would be continued through Zerubbabel.

God would make Zerubbabel **“as a signet.”** A signet was the king’s royal seal by which all documents were authenticated. It was usually a ring or a small cylinder engraved with the king’s name, personal likeness or coat of arms. If a

ring, it was worn on his finger (Jer. 22:24), if a cylinder, about his neck or arm (Gen. 38:18; Song of Sol. 8:6). If a document were written on a clay tablet, the signet was pressed into the clay. If it were written on papyrus, beeswax would be dripped on it and the seal imposed. The meaning of all of this is that Zerubbabel, as David's heir, through whom Messiah would come, would be treasured, protected and safely kept by God.

God had "**chosen**" Zerubbabel for this honor. It was not the Persian overlords, or the Hebrews who had done so, it was Jehovah. The fulfillment of this concluding promise is seen when one consults the genealogy of Christ recorded by Matthew: "...Jechoniah begat Shealtiel; and Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel; and Zerubbabel begat Abiud...and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (Matt. 1:12-16). Joseph was the adoptive father of Jesus, and the lineage passed through him to our Lord. Luke also confirms his connection to David through Mary's family (Luke. 3:23-27).

Because of the prophecy spoken through Jeremiah (22:28-30) no descendent of Jechoniah could "**prosper sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah.**" Hence the Jews lived under the dominion of Persians, Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians, and Romans until their end came in 70 A.D. Jesus came and claimed the throne of David (Luke 1:32-37), but his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His dominion is spiritual, it is the church (Matt. 16:18-19), over which he reigns from his throne in heaven (Acts 2:30-33, 36).

With these precious words of exhortation and encouragement, the book of Haggai closes. Small and poor though they were, the remnant knew that God had not forgotten his promises to David. By God's grace they would survive and by faith their cause would prevail.

## LESSONS TO REMEMBER

- Today's church needs men like Haggai to help her get God's work done. We need exhorters. Anyone can fuss, but it is a gift from God to be an exhorter (Rom. 12:6-8).
- It is our task to remind our brethren to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33).
- In Haggai and Zechariah, we see the realist and the idealist working together to accomplish God's will.
- The Hebrews of Haggai's day remind us of the danger of lapsing into self-contentment and allowing God's business to go unattended.

- Rather than be discouraged by scenes of decadence among God's people, we should be challenged to change the situation for the better.
- Haggai knew the importance of dealing with the urgent needs of the present hour (Eccle. 3:1).
- Those who expect great things from God, must attempt great things for him. Haggai taught his brethren to seek God's kingdom (Matt. 6:33). The major hindrance to receiving God's blessing is ourselves. It is always fatal to leave God out of our plans.
- We can see God's mighty hand of providence, either to bless or to chastise his people and to destroy His enemies.
- We see in this book, the awful contagion of sin. A healthy person cannot give his health to others, but a sick man can give his disease. So it is with sin. A stern rebuke with a call to duty is always good medicine for God's people.
- In this study we see the value of self-examination. "Consider your ways" (1:7). Plato said, "An unexamined life is unworthy of man."
- A small group, even though poor, can do great things for God if the dedication and determination are there.
- Some of the Jews in Babylon sent a contribution, but the ones who saved Judaism from death gave their all. So with the Cause of Christ today.



## ZECHARIAH,

### THE MESSIANIC PROPHET

Although he stands among the Minor Prophets, Zechariah is an intellectual and spiritual giant whose message helped to re-establish post-exilic Israel. His prophecies of Messiah shine forth like beacon lights in the darkness.

#### About The Author

This book is **“the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo”** (1:1). While all scholars freely grant Zechariah’s authorship of the first eight chapters, liberal critics boldly deny that he wrote chapters nine through fourteen. With those, who across the centuries, have loved and respected the inspired Word of God, we accept the book as a unit from the prophet Zechariah.

The name Zechariah means “he whom Jehovah remembers.” Thus his name reflects the theme of his message. Twenty-seven Old Testament personalities share the name of Zechariah. Bible students must always be careful to determine just which of these is under consideration in a given text. Our Zechariah is mentioned three times outside his own book (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:16).

The prophet’s father was Berechiah, the son of Iddo (1:1). Iddo was a Levitical priest who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1, 4, 7). Iddo was the head of a priestly family. At a later date, Zechariah appears to have succeeded his grandfather as head of the priestly group (Neh. 12:16). Zechariah was thus a Levitical priest as well as a prophet.

Our subject was born in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with the first band of exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. It is likely that he made his home in or near Jerusalem, where his work was done. As a prophet, priest and head of his father’s house, Zechariah would have enjoyed great influence

and respect. In chapter 2:4, he is called a “young man” The Hebrew word “**naar**” means boy, lad or youth. Thus he was likely young when he began his preaching.

The writings of Zechariah reflect an engaging personality, a simple, hearty, practical man. His spirit was dedicated to love, justice and man’s need for freedom and a happy home. Three favorable characteristics of the man are visible from his book: his sanity, his moral emphasis and his warm sympathy.

The ministry of Zechariah was remarkable. His immediate mission was to inspire his fellow Hebrews to complete the rebuilding of Jehovah’s temple. Along with Haggai, he worked to restore their recognition of God’s government over them and reorganize in Israel, the true worship of God. He strove to purge the last vestiges of idolatry from the land and to rekindle faith and hope in his fellow-countrymen. This he did in the face of prevailing desolation and hardship. He inspired the disheartened Hebrews by predicting, in glowing terms, the glory to come in future generations. Zechariah foresaw and told of Messiah’s coming and the establishment of his kingdom. Zechariah and Isaiah exceed all the other prophets in Messianic prediction. To Zechariah goes the credit for keeping the Messianic hope alive in those dreary days of reconstruction. He called for righteousness in home life, government, and worship. Rather than condemn or criticize his people, he exhorted them to higher planes of living.

### **The Socio-Political Background**

The first prophecy of Zechariah was given in the eighth month of the second year of Darius Hystaspes who was called “The Great.” We would reckon this as November 520 B.C. Earlier in 536 B.C., 42,360 Jews, plus their servants, had returned from exile in Babylon. They were led by Zerrubabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. Work on God’s temple had started the year following (Ezra 3:8), but was soon stopped when confronted by local opposition (Ezra 4:21-24). Sixteen years had now passed. The people were so disheartened that they were content to allow their house of worship to sit uncompleted. No priests were yet worthy to officiate in sacrifice (Zech. 3:1-5). Upon the accession of Darius Hystaspes to Persia’s throne, Haggai and Zechariah challenged their brethren to recommence work on the temple.

When Darius came to power in 521, he was confronted with uprisings in twenty-three of his provinces. Nineteen major battles were fought before the rebellion was crushed.

Times were hard in Judea. Crop failures, a serious economic depression and ruin faced the beleaguered little nation. They learned from history what they had refused to learn from their prophets.

The contemporaries of Zechariah were Haggai, the prophet; Joshua, the high priest; and Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. Under the leadership of these men the temple was completed early in 515 B.C.

### **About The Book**

The book is named after its inspired author. Zechariah was a gifted poet and much of his book is written in poetic style. "Zechariah's prophecy was not so much an emotional message as it was a literacy product and as such comparable to a sacred drama of the Middle Ages" (Cadman). Of the twelve minor prophets, only Zechariah majors in visions. His visions are revealed in the first six chapters. The visions of Zechariah are symbolic rather than historical, as are Daniel's. This is important to remember when we begin interpreting those prophecies. Zechariah's style is both apocalyptic and eschatological. The last section of his book is similar in content and style to Isaiah.

The author dates the first section of his book. The first prophecy is dated 520 B.C., the second year of Darius (1:1). The second and third messages came in 519 (1:7; 7:1). The last portion, chapters 9-14, is generally thought to be from a later period of his ministry.

Zechariah's book was initially written for that body of Hebrews who had returned to Palestine after the Babylon captivity. Of course its larger message is universal in its scope.

Five **purposes** are evident in the book. His primary concern was to see the temple of God completed. He wished to show the Hebrews that they would be successful in their efforts to restore the nation. He reaffirmed God's love for Israel. He explained to them that moral failure was the cause of their fathers' rejection by God and that obedience was the condition of their return to favor. Zechariah wrote to prepare the Jews for the coming Messiah and his kingdom.

Zechariah paints a vivid series of **prophetic portraits of Messiah**. He presents Christ as "the Branch" (3:8) and the "servant" (3:2). Christ will build the temple or church of God (6:12) and reign upon his throne as a priest-king (6:13). Messiah will enter Jerusalem upon the foal of an ass (9:9). He sets forth Christ as the "good shepherd" (9:16; 11:11), and as the smitten shepherd (13:7). The hands of Christ will be pierced (12:10). He will be offered for sin

(12:10; 13:1). He will judge Jerusalem (14:3-8). His reign will be worldwide in nature (14:9-21).

Many of Zechariah's symbols are used by John in the New Testament, such as the four horsemen (Compare 6:1-8 with Revelation 6:1-8); the olive trees and candlesticks of 4:2-10 with Revelation 11:4).

When we **compare Zechariah and Haggai**, we note that Haggai's first message was one of rebuke while Zechariah's was one of comfort and encouragement. Haggai's task was chiefly to rouse the people to build the temple while Zechariah sought to lead the people to a complete spiritual reform. Haggai's message centered around the local situation in Judah in 520-516 B.C., while Zechariah's message was universal in scope.

Liberal scholars seek to divide the book of Zechariah and attribute it to different scholars. Since 1632 scholars have noticed the difference in style and concept between chapters 1-8 and 9-14. The first section relates to the practical job of building the temple and is written in the first person. The latter part is universal in its concern. The last portion begins with a different terminology. "The burden of the word of Jehovah" (9:1; 12:1). The conclusions of the liberal critics are subjective and arbitrary and they are hopelessly at odds with themselves. For a thorough analysis and refutation of their false views, see **An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets** by Hobart E. Freeman or **Old Testament Introduction** by John Raven.

### **Some Miscellaneous Information About the Book**

Zechariah was well acquainted with the writings of the inspired men before him and, more than any other prophet, used their words in his book.

He presents the most complete portrait of the coming Messiah of any Hebrew writer. It seems to be his aim to condense in his message almost all that had been said by the earlier prophets about Messiah's coming.

Of the twelve "minor prophets," Zechariah's book is the largest. The term "minor prophets" refers not to their spiritual value, but to the size of their books as contrasted with Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.

Spiritual forces play an important role in Zechariah's book. Angels are bearers of God's revelation (1:14). He is the only prophet who speaks of Satan (3:2).

The ancient rabbis said our subject was member of the Great Synagogue, later known as the Sanhedrian.



The book of Zechariah is to the Old Testament what the book of Revelation is to the New.

**“Jehovah of hosts”** is a favorite expression of Zechariah. It presents Jehovah as leader of the armies of heaven.

Chapter 1:1-6 exhibits “one of the strongest and most intensely spiritual calls to repentance to be found anywhere in the Old Testament.”

Zechariah 2:12 is the only place in Scripture where Palestine is called **“the holy land.”** This phrase has become a standard name for that location.

Our prophet has a lot to say about the Angel of Jehovah. Appendix A explores the general teaching of the Bible on this special angel.

In Matthew 27:9-10, Matthew obviously quotes from Zechariah but attributes it to Jeremiah. Theo Laetsch suggests that “Matthew combines two prophecies, one from Zechariah (11:12-14) and the other from Jeremiah (32:6-8).” Ascribing both to the latter prophet.

Matthew 23:35 mentions a Zechariah the son of Barachiah who was martyred in the temple. Rather than Zechariah, it appears that he has reference to a Zechariah mentioned in II Chronicles 24:20 who is called “the son of Jehoiada, the priest.” In response, the following information is offered. There is no historical indication that our Zechariah was martyred. Some have suggested that perhaps Jehoiada also bore the name of Barachiah. Others have suggested that we have here an early interpolation in Matthew” record by some scribe, since the expression, “son of Barachiah” is not mentioned by (Luke. 11:51). Given the total reliability of the sacred text in the overwhelming majority of its content we can rest confident that the mere handful of textual problems such as this can be resolved without destroying confidence in the authenticity of our Bible. Given the antiquity of the Bible and the fallibility of human hands to make a perfect copy of any extensive written document, we are astounded at the remarkable state of preservation of the Holy Writ.

Bible scholars have been impressed by Zechariah. Martin Luther said, Zechariah is “the quintessence of Old Testament prophecy.” “He had the soul of an artist, the eye of a seer” (Ward). G. L. Robinson wrote, that he was “a man of unusual, almost unparalleled, vision.” J.S. Perowne observed, “At the time, no more fitting instrument could be found to rouse the people whose hearts had grown cold, than one who united the authority of the prophets, the zeal and the traditions of the sacerdotal (priestly) family.”

was still with them. Its fulfillment was before their eyes. The God who had spoken through the former prophets was yet alive and ruling his creation. The survivors could only concede “Like as Jehovah hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath, he dealt with us” (1:6b). In the words of Jesus, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

### **Eight Visions Given and Explained (1:7-6:8)**

Beginning with 1:7 and extending through 6:8, we have a series of eight visions and their explanations. Five months had passed since the people, in response to Haggai’s preaching, had commenced the restoration of the holy temple. It was three months since Zechariah had spoken his first message. The Hebrews were making an honest effort to do God’s will in the matter. In the visions which follow, the prophet sought to edify and encourage his brethren by unfolding God’s plan for the future of his people.

The message came to Zechariah on the twenty-fourth day of Shebat, the eleventh month. That would be our January/ February.

**“I saw in the night, and, behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom and behind him there were horses, red, sorrel, and white” (1:8).** This is a vision or a dream which the prophet saw in the night. It was a revelation of God’s will. The man upon the red horse was **“the angel that talked with”** the prophet (1:9). He is identified as the Angel of Jehovah in 1:11. The Angel of Jehovah, conversed with Jehovah in 1:12. A detailed study of the Angel of Jehovah is provided in Appendix A following these comments on Zechariah. Here we will simply point out that this angel is presented as the second person of the godhead who comes down to earth to deal with man. A study of all the available information identifies him as the Word of God. The Angel of Jehovah appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2), and “God said unto Moses, “ I AM THAT I AM.” “And he said, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Ex. 3:14-15). In John 8:58, Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” Thus he identifies himself with the Angel of Jehovah of former ages. It is not to be taken that Jesus is therefore a created being, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses affirmed. It means rather that **he is the messenger of the Godhead**, for such is the meaning of the word “angel.”

The man (angel) on the red horse is seen standing among the myrtle tress in the bottom. By “bottom” he means lowland or shady place. He speaks of a creek bottom. Homer Hailey suggests that this “may suggest the low status

of Israel as the time.” In the bottom were myrtle trees, a shrub indigenous to the valleys of Palestine.

The colors of the horses were red, sorrel, and white. In Zechariah 6:1-8 and Revelation 6:2-8 the colors definitely have symbolic meaning. Red, meaning bloodshed and war; white, triumph and victory; black, famine and hardship; pale (bay, grizzled, speckled), pestilence. All of these relate to war as a judgment of God upon people. In Zechariah 1:8-11, we are told that **“These (horsemen) are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.”** They reported to the angel of Jehovah that **“all the earth sitteth still and is at rest”** (1:11). It seems that they symbolize God’s providential agents who keep watch over his people and the world in which they live. **“All the earth...is at rest”** means undisturbed by war and uprisings. At his ascension Darius had faced uprisings in twenty-three provinces; nineteen battles had to be fought to secure his throne. Now, peace prevailed. Haggai promised that God would soon “shake all nations” (2:6-7), but that was yet to come. The time the vision was received was the calm between the storm.

Zechariah overheard the angel of Jehovah asking, **“O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?”** (1:12). This was a question on the mind of every one of the returned remnant. When would the hard times pass? When would their cities be rebuilt? When would the favor of heaven shine upon them? The **“threescore and ten years”** referred to their seventy years of servitude in Babylon. Two periods of time equaled seventy years. From the time that Nebuchadnezzar first annexed Judah to his domain in 606 B.C. to the time of Cyrus’ decree allowing the Jews to return home in 536 was seventy years. From the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 to the rebuilding of the temple in 516/515 B.C. was seventy years. The latter period is the mentioned by Zechariah.

**“And Jehovah answered the angel...with good words, even comfortable words”** (1:13). The response was favorable, the news was good. It comforted the discouraged people.

### **The Angel Conveys the Divine Message to the Prophet**

**“I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction”** (1:14-15).

## Keys That Unlock Zechariah's Message

The **key verses** of this book are three:

1:3, "Return unto me, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will return unto you."

8:3, "Thus saith Jehovah; I am returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem."

13:1, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

The **key phrase** is "Jehovah of hosts" which is used fifty-two times by the writer, eighteen times in chapter 8 alone.

The **key thought** is, if the nation will dedicate themselves to serving God, he will return to them with manifold blessings.

### A Simple Summary

I. Visions of Restoration (Chapters 1-6).

II. Oracles of Appeal (Chapters 7-8).

III. Disclosures of Destiny (Chapters 9-14).

## EXPOSITION

### Chapter I

#### Messages of Encouragement Regarding the Completion of God's Temple (1:1-8:23).

The prophet opens his book with a call to repentance (1:1-6). He dates his first message in, "**the eighth month, in the second year of Darius,**" i.e., in November 520 B.C. (1:1). Darius is Darius the son of Hytaspes. He was king of Persia and reigned thirty-six years. Zechariah began his public work some two months after Haggai had launched his ministry (Compare Haggai 1:1).

The prophet identifies himself as "**the son of Berechiah the son of Iddo**" (1:1b). Iddo was the head of a priestly family who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Heb. 12:1-16). Thus our writer was both prophet and priest.

## His Initial Message was:

**“Jehovah was sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, thus saith Jehovah of host: Return unto me saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will return unto you...” (1:2-3).** He reminds them that God was “sore displeased” with their fathers (1:2), i.e., “angry with anger” (F.C. Cook). As a consequence of his displeasure with their sin, he had given their land over to the Babylonians and allowed them to be carried into captivity. To avoid the same penalties their fathers had suffered, he calls upon them to return to Jehovah. “Return” in this context does not mean return to the homeland from Babylon. This the people addressed had done. It means to return to faithful obedience to Jehovah (Compare Isaiah 1:16-18). If they would return to God, then he would return to them. James used similar words, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jas. 4:8). This shows us that man is not just a passive recipient in his salvation. God expects sinful men to move toward him through faith and repentance. One is impressed with how often Zechariah uses the phrase **“saith Jehovah”** to substantiate and authenticate his message. Five times he does so in the six verses of his first oracle. Modern preachers would do well to reflect the same reliance on divine authority when they speak. Of course, the only way we can do so is to cite the written word of God, the Scripture.

Zechariah warns his neighbors **“Be ye not as your fathers unto whom the former prophets cried, saying...return ye now from your evil ways.... but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me...” (vs. 4).** The **“former prophets”** were those faithful men of God whom God sent to his people prior to the Babylonian captivity; men like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. They too, had preached repentance (Compare Jeremiah 7:23-28). If Zechariah’s contemporaries behaved toward God as did their wicked fathers, they could, except similar results. When men refused to hear God’s appointed prophets. They refused God himself. The same is true today (John 13:20).

He then poses three questions to the people: **“Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statues, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake you fathers?” (1: 5-6).** Their fathers, to whom the former prophets spoke, were long since dead. Most of them had died in the Babylonian invasion or in captivity as the prophets had warned. The older prophets were also dead. This could refer to the true prophets like Jeremiah who spoke God’s word of warning or to false prophets who denied that God would destroy his people (Compare Jeremiah 28:1-4, 10-11, 15-17). **“But my words”** is set in antithesis to the fathers and prophets who were long since dead. God’s word of prophecy

God is not jealous as are we with a selfish, petty jealousy. His jealousy is manifested in genuine care and concern for his people and an earnest zeal to deliver them from their oppression and afflictions. Note that his jealousy is “present tense.” God’s love has never varied towards Israel (Jer. 31:3). God was “sore displeased with the nations” that had afflicted his people. Pusey renders this, “with great anger, I am angered.” To the Hebrews, it seemed that their God had forgotten their sad situation. He wants to assure them this is not so.

God’s being “**but a little displeased**” with Israel must be understood in contrast with the hostility of their Gentile oppressors. For Israel’s sin, God chastised her by sending her into captivity for seventy years. He did so to purify and reform her that might then re-establish her in her native land (Is. 54:7-8). Her heathen neighbors would have utterly destroyed her. For their undue severity, God held the Assyrians, Babylonians, and others accountable (Compare Isaiah 47:5-7, 11). These lines remind us of how the mighty God uses the sinful nations of the world to do his will. They are his unconscious instruments for punishing other nations. God uses yet other nations to punish them for their crimes because they act from their own selfish, wicked motives (Compare Isaiah 10:5-16).

**“Therefore thus saith Jehovah: “I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it....and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem” (1:16).** “Therefore” draws a conclusion from the proceeding verses (1:13-15). Because he was jealous for his people, God has returned to Jerusalem. **“I am returned”** (perfect tense) “denotes an accomplished fact whose blessings will continue indefinitely” (Theo Laetsch). God was returned **“with mercies.”** Mercy is one of his glorious attributes. In wrath he remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2). The divine mercy would be seen in three ways: **“My house (temple) shall be built;” “Jerusalem shall be rebuilt;” and “My cities shall yet overflow with prosperity” (1:16-17).**

**“A line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem” (1:16).** This refers to the surveyor’s line used to mark off the streets and boundaries in view of rebuilding it (II Kings 21:13).

The keynote of this first oracle is found in (1:17b), **“Jehovah shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem.”** These words are adapted from (Is. 14:1).

## The Second Vision (1:18-21)

**“And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, what are these? And he answered me; these are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem” (1:18-19).** The expression **“I...saw”** indicates the beginning of a new revelation.

The **“four horns”** are said to be **“the horns which have scattered”** God’s people. The sight of horns implies the presence of the animals that wield them. David’s fourth beast had ten horns (Dan. 7: 7-8). The angel explained to Daniel, **“the fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth”** (Dan. 7:23). Horns of beasts are symbols of powerful kings (Dan. 7:24). In another vision, Daniel saw **“a ram which had two horns”** (8:3). These symbolized the combined nation of the Medes and Persians. He then saw a he-goat (the Greek Empire) with a **“notable horn between his eyes”** which symbolized Alexander the Great (8:5; 20-21). Sometimes the word horn is used to symbolize the power wielded by a man or government. Thus the Psalmist writes, **“I said... to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck”** (Ps. 75:4-5).

Which nations are symbolized by the horns? Since he speaks of those **“which have (past tense, not shall or future action) scattered Judah (Southern Kingdom), Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Jerusalem,** they most likely represent Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. Other scholars harmonize the kingdoms with Daniel’s four beasts (Dan. 2:31-45) which are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, but none of these nations scattered the northern kingdom of Israel. Assyria did that.

**“And Jehovah showed me four smiths. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spoke saying, these are the horns which scattered Judah... but these are come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah...” (1:20-21).** The word **“smiths”** means blacksmiths, men who work with domesticated animals, shoeing, or dehorning them. The (KJV) renders the word **“carpenters”** which is unfortunate. In his vision, the prophet sees the great horned beasts (powerful nations) that have buffeted and scattered God’s people. He then sees agents sent by God to break the power of those nations. Historically we know that Babylon broke Assyria and Egypt’s power, the Medes and the Persians in turn broke Babylon. Greece destroyed the Persians and Rome the Greeks, etc, etc. From this the Hebrew were to take courage. With their God in control of the universe, no nation could prevail over them permanently.

## CHAPTER II

### The Third Vision Fills the Entire Second Chapter:

**“And I ...saw, and, behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, whither goest thou? And he said unto me, to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth hereof, and what is the length thereof” (2:1-2).** The prophet then saw yet another vision. In it he saw a man with a surveyor’s line, laying out the perimeters of Jerusalem in view of rebuilding her walls. As he was watching he reports:

**“...the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein. For I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her” (2:3-5).** As the man was proceeding to mark the lines for the walls of Jerusalem, the prophet saw the other angel go forth to meet him. One of the angels said to the other “run,” i.e., hurry; tell the man that **“Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls.”** This verse is applied by some to the literal city of Jerusalem, by others to spiritual Jerusalem, the church (Heb. 12:22-23). If it refers to historic Jerusalem we must not press for a literal interpretation since Jerusalem’s walls were built by Nehemiah with God’s blessing. The emphasis is on the simile **“as villages without walls.”** A city needed walls for protection in times of war. In peaceful times, walls were unneeded (See Ezekiel 38:11). Thus he promises that the people will dwell in peace and safety. A second reason is given for Jerusalem needing no walls. Her population would soon be so great that no walls could contain them. Both of these concepts would have given great consolation to the little band of immigrants who were threatened on every side. Those who see this as Messianic stress the fact that Jerusalem did in fact have walls built and the Holy Spirit does indwell his church (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The author prefers the literal view as it is in harmony with the general flow of this first section of the book.

Jehovah being a wall of fire about his people is reminiscent of Elisha’s experience at Dothan when “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (II Kings 6:17). This angelic protection was invisible to all, until the Lord opened their eyes.

**“I will be the glory in the midst of her”** might have a double meaning. The older members of the community remembered the former days of Jerusalem’s grandeur and Solomon’s glorious temple. They wept at the ruined state of



their city and the inferior temple they were raising up. Perhaps God means my presence will provide more than adequate glory for their city and temple (Compare Isaiah 60:19). The other possibility is the special use of the word glory in connection with the temple to indicate God's symbolic presence, the *shekinah*, which is styled "the glory of the Lord" (Compare Ezekiel 43:1-7).

Chapter 2 verses 6-13, is a call to hesitant Hebrew exiles to return to Judah to help rebuild God's nation.

**"Ho, ho, flee from the land of the north, saith Jehovah; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, saith Jehovah. Ho Zion, escape, thou that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon (2:6-7). "Ho" is a call to attention. "The land of the north" is identified in verse 7 as Babylon. By consulting a map of the Middle East one can see that Babylon lay south and east of Jerusalem. Yet it is frequently identified as "the land of the north" since one had to travel north and then south down the Euphrates River Valley to get there. In those days, the vast Arabian Desert was uncrossable. The Hebrews had been "spread abroad as the four winds" in their various deportations and exile. Assyria and Babylon had scattered them, but now, under Darius' benevolent reign, they could return home.**

**"For thus saith Jehovah of hosts: After glory hath he sent me unto the nations which plundered you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall be a spoil to those that served them; and ye shall know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me" (2:8-9). It is the angel of Jehovah that speaks in verse 8. He is "Jehovah of hosts" yet Jehovah the Father hath sent him on his earthly mission in behalf of Israel. The "glory" for which he was sent seems to have been glory to the God of the Hebrews. It would come by his taking vengeance upon the heathen nations that had plundered the Hebrews in the days of their exile in Babylon. Not only did Babylon spoil them, but Edom and other of their neighbors had afflicted them at various times (Obad. 10-14).**

The Hebrews were **"the apple of his (God's) eye"** (vs. 8). The Hebrew suggests "the gate or opening of his eye" (F.C. Cook) which refers to the pupil. The eye, being the part of man's body which is most delicate and most susceptible to pain, is carefully guarded. So God will guard and protect this people. In other passages the expression "apple of his eye" is from a different Hebrew term and means "the little man of the pupil," i.e., the reflection of a father seen in the bright eyes of the child held before his face (See Deuteronomy 32:10).

God will **"shake his hand over"** Israel's enemies and they will be spoiled by Israel (2:9). This suggests two possible ideas: (1) God will shake or wave his

hand in blows of punishment or (2) with ease, he will wave his enemies away into destruction (Compare Isaiah 19:16). This He did to the Chaldeans.

The enemy that had conquered, looted and enslaved the Hebrews would become **“a spoil to those that served them...”** (2:9b). This is not to be taken literally for Babylon never became subservient to Israel. Babylon was destroyed politically and culturally while Israel survived to go home and rebuild their nation. Cyrus, the Persian, restored to them the sacred items of the temple which the Babylonians had taken. He also helped to finance their restoration with the wealth he had taken from the defeated Babylonians (See Ezra 1:7-11).

When all of these things came to pass then the Hebrews would know assuredly that God had sent his angelic messenger to reveal these prophetic truths and Zechariah who recorded them for the people. Fulfillment of prophecy is the proof of its truthfulness (Compare Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

**“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah”** (2:10). “Daughters of Zion” or Jerusalem is a favorite phrase of inspired writers. It is cited some thirty-six times in the concordance. In this place it refers to “the true believers in Jehovah and his word. These who fled out of Babel, giving heed to Jehovah’s call...” (H. Halley). God’s promise to come and **“dwell in the midst of thee”** is related to the rebuilding Jehovah’s temple which yet lay in ruins at the time Zechariah spoke his message. Jehovah was said to dwell in his temple because his “glory” or *shekinah* was seen in the most holy place, above the mercy seat. In a vision, Ezekiel had seen the glory of Jehovah leave the temple before the Babylonians destroyed it (Ezek. 10:18-19). In still another vision he foresaw the day when Jehovah would return to dwell in his restored home (Ezek. 44:1-5).

**“And many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah in that day and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee”** (2:11). “Nations” refers to Gentiles. This projects the prophecy into that distant day when Messiah would come to dwell among the Hebrews (John. 1:14) and would invite all nations to become his disciples (Matt. 28:19). Gentiles would have access to the divine promise through the gospel (Eph. 3:6). Thus when verses 10-11 are considered together we can see that we have a dual prophecy with an early fulfillment in the return of Jehovah to his restored temple and a distant fulfillment in the incarnation of Christ and the Christian age.

**“And Jehovah shall inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land...”** (2:12). This was written to encourage the despondent Hebrews to get on

with the rebuilding of God's temple. Keil renders this "and Jehovah will take possession of Judah...." When the proper preparations have been made, Jehovah, like a victorious king, will come and possess what is rightfully his. Palestine is here called "the holy land" because it is where Jehovah will dwell. This is the only place in scripture where it is so designated. From this reference it has become the most common term for that portion of the earth.

**"Be silent, all flesh, before Jehovah; for he is waked up out of his holy habitation"** (2:13). This echoes Habakkuk 2:20 and is a call for reverence before the great God of Israel. God being pictured as awakening for sleep is an anthropomorphic figure, i.e., the author likens God to king who has been resting momentarily, but now he is awake and ready to act on behalf of his people. It is to be understood figuratively because God is omnipotent; hence he never needs to rest or slumber (Ps. 121:3-4).

## CHAPTER III

### The Trial and Acquittal of Joshua the High Priest (3:1-10)

**"And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary"** (3:1). The previous visions had predicted that God would exercise his power among the nations to reestablish his people in their land. This one is telling the Hebrews that in order for God to do the other there must first be spiritual reform in the priesthood and the nation.

**"Joshua the high priest"** was properly descended from the priestly family. His grandfather Seriah was taken captive by the Babylonians and slain at Rivlah (II Kings. 25:18-21). Jehozadak, Joshua's father, was taken to Babylon (I Chron. 6:15). Joshua was likely born during the captivity. The problem was that he and the whole priesthood had not yet been properly cleansed and purified after their long years in a heathen environment. Hence they were not properly prepared to lead the nation in divine service. In the vision, Zechariah sees Satan accusing Joshua on this very point. His uncleanness is symbolized by his **"filthy garments."** When approaching God, the high priest was to **"put on the holy linen coat...the linen breeches upon his flesh and... the linen girdle, and...the linen mitre...they are holy garments; and he shall bathe his flesh in water..."** (Lev. 16:4). Joshua's condition was representative of the nation. Verse 9 says **"I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."**

Satan is seen standing at Joshua's right hand accusing him as he attempted to minister before the Lord for the people. The very name Satan means "accuser." He likewise accused Job (Job. 1:6-12; 2:1-6). In Revelation 12:10, John calls him "the accuser of our brethren." Satan was determined to defeat God's purpose for Israel even if it meant he must appeal to God's law to do so. He sought to neutralize God's appointed system for forgiveness by discrediting the priesthood and thus nullifying their functions.

**"And Jehovah said unto Satan"** (i.e., the Angel of Jehovah who was communicating with Zechariah) (1:12). **"Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee..."** (3:2a). At God's powerful rebuke, his enemies flee (Is. 17:13). In this rebuke, Jehovah rejects Satan's charge on the basis that He had chosen or elected Israel to be his people and He would see that their sins were purged and their deficiencies supplied. Paul uses the same line of reasoning on behalf of Christians in Romans 8:31-34.

**"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"** (3:2b). Joshua was like a piece of wood plucked out of the fire just in time to keep it from being consumed. Amos used a similar phrase (Amos 4:11). Also a brand plucked from the fire would be charred and covered with soot. The fire was the Babylonian exile. Joshua and his fellow priests could well have been consumed there. By the grace of God they had been salvaged.

To symbolize the purifying of Joshua so that he might function acceptably, the angel orders those who stand by to remove his filthy garments that he might clothe him with rich apparel. The meaning is clear; **"I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee"** (3:4).

The **"mitre"** was the sacred hat worn by the priest when ministering at the temple (Ex. 29:6).

**"The angel of Jehovah"** (3:6) was directing the procedure to make sure that Satan did not reassert himself and interfere. Joshua is warned by the angel of Jehovah that if he is to judge God's house and keep his courts, he must **"walk in (God's) ways"** and **"keep (his) charge"** (3:7). While their salvation from captivity had been a matter of grace, to maintain their standing would be conditioned upon their faithfulness to God's word.

**"Hear now O Joshua....thou and thy fellows that sit before me...."** (3:8a). Not only did Joshua need to be purified, but so did all of his fellow priests.

**"For they are men that are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch"** (vs. 8b). The fact that God saved and restored the priesthood

(i.e., Joshua and his fellow-priests) was a sign or symbolic of the fact that he would one day bring Christ the “high priest of the good things to come...” (Heb. 9:11). Christ is frequently called “my servant” (Compare Isaiah 42:1, 49:6, 52:13). God’s servant is also called “Branch” which means a shoot or sprout that springs from the roots of a tree. It is symbolic of the beginning of renewed life for the tree. Isaiah calls Messiah Branch in 4:2 and 11:1, as does Jeremiah in 23:5 and 33:15 of his book. The picture painted by the word “branch” is that of David’s dynasty which was cut down like a tree at the time of the Babylonian domination (See Jeremiah 22:28-30). After many years, Christ, like a sprout from the roots of the fallen tree, appears and restores the dynasty of David according to the divine promise (II Sam. 7:12-16). At first, David and his heirs ruled over a worldly political kingdom in Palestine, now Christ is seated at God’s right hand ruling over his spiritual kingdom, the church (Acts 2:32-36; Eph. 1:20-22).

**“For behold the stone that I have set before Joshua; upon one stone are seven eyes...” (3:9a).** The stone to which the angel alludes is the “top stone” or cap stone of the temple, i.e., the final stone to be set in place in the finished building (see 4:7).

The “seven eyes” are explained as “the eyes of Jehovah, which run to and fro through the whole world” (4:10). This speaks of God’s providential agents at work in the world to assure that his will be done. In Chapter 4:10a he is told “these seven (eyes) shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.” He is describing the laying of the final stone and thus the completion of the temple restoration project. The number “seven” stands for completion and/or perfection. The idea of “seven eyes” also suggests God’s omniscience. All is known to him, including Israel’s future. Probably the cap stone was to be actually engraved with the seven eyes.

**“And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (3:9b).** Given the immediate context, the day when iniquity shall be removed will be when the temple is completed, the priesthood properly purified and dedicated and the Day of Atonement observed (Lev. 16:21, 30, 34). Most commentators regard the stone as Messiah’s kingdom and the iniquity to be removed, his atonement at Calvary (See Pusey’s Notes). The present author agrees with Henderson that it refers to the completion of the temple in Zachariah’s day. The expression “in one day” may speak of the swiftness with which Jehovah will accomplish this deed.

**“In that day shall ye invite every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig-tree” (3:10).** This, is a Hebrew idiom for a peaceful period in

history (See I Kings 4:25). They have been through hard and dangerous times. Now that they are complying with God's will, peace will be enjoyed.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Golden Candlestick and the Two Olive Trees (4:1-14).

Overcome by the previous revelations, the prophet had fallen asleep. The angel now awakes him to view yet another vision. **“Behold a candlestick all of gold with its bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon: there are seven pipes to each of the lamps which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof”** (4:2-3). The image of the golden candlestick is borrowed from the lamp in the tabernacle (the Menorah) (Ex. 25:31-40). It is usually noted that it is not an exact replica in every detail. The Holy Spirit made such adjustments to the picture as needed to make his point in the vision. In Revelation, John uses the lamp stand to represent the church (Rev. 1:20). From this usage some conclude that the lamp represents the restored nation. I would include with that the restoration of the proper worship of God in his rebuilt temple.

Zechariah had no question about the lamp, but he was perplexed about the two olive branches that emptied their golden oil into the bowl of the lamp (4:11-12). The angel explained that **“these are the two anointed ones that stand by the lord of the whole earth”** (4:14). It is generally understood that the two anointed ones represent Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, the governor. Both men were anointed when appointed to their office. Like the olive tree provided the essential ingredients to keep the lamps burning, so those two men of God would lead the nation in completing their temple and rebuilding their nation.

The **“great mountain”** of (4:7) likely stands for the obstacles that had hindered their program thus far. The obstacles, huge as mountains, would be leveled by God so that Zerubbabel could complete the temple, by placing the cap stone in its place. Verse 9 contains a strong promise to the weary workers. Zerubbabel had laid the foundation stone some 15 years before, he will now see it completed (4:9).

The completion of the temple under Zerubbabel's leadership would be confirmation that God had sent these words of exhortation to them through Zechariah (4:9).

**“Who hath despised the day of small things?”** (4:10). God asks this question of those Hebrews and their neighbors who looked upon the rebuilt temple and thought how inferior it was to Solomon’s great building. Haggai said to those who had seen the former house in its, glory, “is it (the rebuilt temple) not in your eyes as nothing?” (Hag. 2:3). Haggai promised that “the latter glory of this (new) house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah” (2:9). This would be true because Messiah, God in the flesh, would one day visit this temple (See Mark 11:15-17). While the discouraged Hebrews, might feel the restored temple was too small and common to be acceptable, the prophet knew better. They had seen Zerubbabel’s work.

**“These seven”** refers to the seven eyes of Jehovah engraved on the capstone (3:9; 4:7). As noted earlier, **“the eyes of Jehovah”** refers to God omniscience and to his providential agents that represent him in the world. The eyes of Jehovah are said to be seven in number. Seven is used by the sacred writers for fulness, or completeness or perfection. Hence, the all-seeing God was fully aware of the people’s work on the temple and approved of their efforts, even though insignificant to themselves and others.

The prophet still is perplexed about the vision and asked the angel, **“What are these two olive trees?”** (4:11). Twice he pressed the messenger for an answer. **“And he answered...These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”** In the Hebrew, the words **“the anointed ones”** mean literally “the sons of oil” (Laetsch). In the Jewish, economy only priests (Ex. 28:41), prophets (I Kings 19:16) and kings (II Sam. 15:1,17) were anointed for their office. The anointing with oil signified the blessing of the Holy Spirit which would inspire and bless the nation’s spiritual and political leadership (Compare I Samuel 16:12-13) The two anointed ones in Zechariah’s vision were Zerubbabel, the governor, a man of David’s dynasty and Joshua the high priest. The candlestick in the vision seems to represent the restored nation of Israel. The light of her leadership will be provided by God’s two anointed, Spirit-filled servants, Zerubbabel and Joshua. They successfully led God’s people in rebuilding his temple and his theocracy. They **“stand by the Lord of the whole earth”** as his obedient servants (4:2-7).

There are several points in this vision that are obscure and stir ones curiosity:

1. That the candlestick is not exactly like those of Moses or Solomon.
2. The number of pipes to each of the lamps. The seven pipes indicate that they would be fully able to provide the light, the leadership needed in this difficult time.
3. Oil trees whose berries drip their oil perpetually.

It is helpful to remember that the prophet sees a vision, not reality. Also in interpreting symbolic language, we do not press for significance in every minor detail, rather we look at the larger, overall scheme of the picture for the general meaning.

## CHAPTER V

### The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)

The sixth vision is of a flying scroll inscribed with a message of judgment for sinners in the land. Remember this is simply a vision, one should not view this as some mythical or magical story as in the **Tales of the Arabian Nights**.

**“ I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth there of ten cubits.”** The prophet sees a giant scroll twenty cubits by ten cubits in size. A cubit is approximately 18 inches. Hence the scroll he saw was 30ft x 15ft. On one side, there was written a curse against thieves, and on the other, one against false swearers who take God’s name in vain. It is seen gliding **“over the face of the whole land”** of Israel. The two sins specified stand representatively for all the sins of men. Also, it is noteworthy that the two sins chosen to represent each of the two tablets of the decalogue. Swearing falsely violated the third commandment and stealing broke the eighth command (See Ex 20:7,15). James observed, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point is become guilty of all (Jas. 2:10). Failure to observe God’s rules would bring judgments and destruction upon a man’s house.

The fourth vision (3:1-8), stressed the importance of cleansing the priesthood. This vision stresses the need for every citizen, to rid himself of the sin and vices common to men. All of this was necessary if they were to receive God’s gracious assistance in rebuilding their temple and nation.

### Sin Shipped Away (5:5-11).

**“This is the ephah that goeth forth...This is their appearance in all the land (and, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead); and this is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is Wickedness: and he cast her down into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof...behold, there came forth two women, and the wind was in their wings; now they had wings like the wings of a stork; and they lifted up the ephah between earth and heaven...To build her a house in the land of Shinar...she shall be set there in her own place”** (4:6-11).



In this vision, Zechariah sees a wicked woman in a basket or container, being carried away from his land, back to Shinar. An ephah is a container that holds some 39 quarts of measure. Here the actual size is not significant; it is a basket large enough to hold a woman. The woman is identified as **wickedness**, i.e., she is the personification of wickedness. Evil Jezebel was called “that wicked woman”(II Chron. 24:7) There is a heavy lid for the basket made of lead which is designed to keep lady wickedness in her container until she is carried away from God’s land. The lid is lifted momentarily so the prophet can see the ugly contents. Then **wickedness** is quickly thrust down in the basket and the heavy lid placed over the opening, lest she escape.

Zechariah then saw two heavenly messengers with great wings, like a stork, whose mission was to take wickedness away from God’s land. No significance is attached to the fact that the messengers are women. It is of interest that this is the only place where heavenly messengers are depicted as women, normally they are men (See Daniel 12:1) In the vision, the messengers are to carry their burden through the air, so they are described as having wings strong enough for the task. The stork is a migratory bird with great strong wings. From this vision most artists have depicted angels with wings. Such is symbolism and not necessarily literally so.

The meaning of the vision is explained in 5:11. Sin will be expelled from the God’s land and a house, i.e., a permanent dwelling for her will be built in Shinar, which is Babylon (Gen. 10:10). The local citizens had but recently returned from the land of Shinar where they had been sent because of their sin. Some of them had evidently brought their sin home with them. Sin had no place in the holy land. Its proper place was in the land of idolatry and wickedness. Most scholars would associate Shinar with the place of rebellion against God’s rule in the days of Nimrod and the tower of Babel (Gen. 10:10;11:1-9) rather than just the Babylon of Zechariah’s day, it seems to the present author that both would likely be included.

C. H. H. Wright reasoned that since the ephah was a measurement used in commerce and since Babylon is called the land of traffic (Ezek. 17:4), perhaps the thought is that crooked and dishonest business practices must also be left behind in Babylon. Such had been a problem prior to the captivity (Mic. 6:11) (See **The Cambridge Bible Commentaries on Haggai and Zechariah** p. 91-91).

## CHAPTER VI

### The Four Chariots (6:1-8)

**“...Behold there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grizzled strong horses...”** (6:1-3). The final of the eight visions is introduced with the usual formula for new revelations: **“I lifted up mine eyes, and saw...”** Charging forth into the valley, between two great mountains, the prophet sees four chariots, each drawn by different colored horses. When he asked the meaning, the angel explained **“These are the four winds of heaven (spirits, footnote) which go forth from standing before the Lord...”** (6:5). John saw the four winds of heaven prepared to bring judgments upon the sinful world of his day (Rev. 7:1). Jeremiah writes of four winds scattering the people of Elam (Jer. 49:36).

In Revelation 6:1-8, John uses four horses to symbolize his message. The man on the white horse came forth conquering. The rider of the red horse took **“peace from the earth....that they should slay one another.”** The man on the black horse symbolized famine and hard times. The rider of the pale horse was named Death and Hades (the open grave) followed him. In Revelation 6:7-8 the pale horse is identified as pestilence (See footnote). These are pictorial representations of what Ezekiel calls God’s **“four sore judgments”** the sword, famine, evil beasts and pestilence” (Ezek. 14:21).

The mountains from whence the chariots came are pictured as made of brass. This was the hardest metal the ancients knew. No specific mountains are identified. Since the chariots of judgment came from God and the two impregnable mountains stood between God and the seer, perhaps they are to be understood as **“gate towers guarding the entrance into the palace of the Supreme Ruler”** (Laetsch).

**“The chariot wherein are the black horses goeth forth toward the north country; and the white went forth after them; and the grizzled went forth toward the south country. And the strong went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth”** (6:6-7).

The chariot drawn by **“the black horses”** was sent **“toward the north county”** (6:6), i.e. north of Jerusalem. This expression is commonly used of the Assyrian and Babylonian nations, both of which were now broken and

subservient to Persia. So cruel had they been, to God's people, that further judgments, would be sent upon them. The black horses symbolized famine. In the first vision God had said that he was "sore displeased with the nations" because of their cruelty toward Israel (Zech. 1:15).

**"The grizzled" horses went "toward the south country" which most likely is Egypt, but may include Edom and Ethiopia. All of whom were ancient enemies of Israel.**

The **"strong" horses of verse seven almost certainly refer to the red bay horses as they the only ones not get assigned. Red symbolizes bloodshed and war. These strong horses were eager to go on their mission of judgment. "They sought to go" and received the divine command, "get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth" (6:7). Their mission was broad, encompassing all of God's enemies. When all had done their assigned work, God's spirit was quieted, i.e., was satisfied that appropriate judgment had been rendered (Compare Ezekiel 16:42).**

The cycle of eight visions opened with attention focused on the heathen nations that had humiliated Israel (1:8-15). They close with a symbolic description of God's righteous judgment on them.

### **The Symbolic Crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)**

**"Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah; and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, whither they are come from Babylon; yea, take of them silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest..." (6:9-11).** In this section the prophet sees no vision, rather he is instructed to perform a symbolic act that will be predictive of the coming messiah. He was to take the Jewish brothers, recently arrived from Babylon, the land of captivity, and go to the house of Josiah, son of Zephaniah (not be confused with Zephaniah the prophet of pre-captivity times). The three, Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah had brought with them gifts of gold and silver for the temple project. They would serve as verifying witnesses. Zechariah was to fashion a double tiered crown of the gold and silver and place it on the head of Joshua the high priest and then speak this oracle:

**"Thus speaketh Jehovah of host...Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah...and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule**

**upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”** (6:12-13). The name Branch was immediately familiar to every devote Hebrew. Isaiah has written of a “shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots...” (11:1) and Jeremiah had related God’s promise to “cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land...” (33:15).

Earlier God had promised Zechariah, to, “bring forth (his) servant the Branch” (3:8). The term pictures the dynasty of David as a tree that had fallen or been cut down. From the roots of the fallen tree a little shoot appears that eventually grows to be a tree mightier than the original one. All understood this to speak of Messiah, David’s heir, promised by God (II Sam. 7:12-13).

Joshua helped to build the material temple in Jerusalem, but Messiah would build God’s spiritual temple, the church (Eph. 2:19-22; I Cor. 3:16-17). It would be made of living stones (I Pet. 2:5).

The two crowns united as one on Joshua’s head symbolized that Messiah would combine the two offices of king and priest over God’s people. Under Moses’ system kings were of the tribe of Judah and priests of Levi. Neither could fill the other post. But through David, in Psalms 110:4, God had promised his Son that he would be a king forever after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Gen. 14:18). Upon his resurrection and ascension, Jesus was given David’s throne, when seated at God’s right hand (Acts 2:28-31). There he will reign until every enemy is subdued (I Cor. 15:25-26). This totally undermines and destroys the speculations and theories of the premillennialists who deny the Lord’s kingdom’s present existence and who look for a later earthly reign.

For Christ to “bear the glory” speaks of his royal majesty as King of kings” (I Chron. 29:25; I Tim. 6:15-16).

**“The counsel of peace shall be between them both.”** The two offices of priest and king will be united in him without discord or conflict with God’s law. In the words of the author of Hebrews, “the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). In his role as priest, the Messiah will bring peace to all who seek him, be they Jew or Gentile. (See Eph. 2:16-18).

**“And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of Jehovah”** (6:14). The symbolic crown (see foot note) was then placed in the hands of the three witnesses **“for a memorial in the temple of Jehovah”** (6:14). Its

presence would be a perpetual reminder of the messianic promise until the Savior came. **“Helem”** of (6:14), is the same as **Heidai”** of (6:10). Authorities are unsure if it is a copyist’s error or a variation of his name.

**“And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of Jehovah...”**(6:15), looks forward, to Messiah’s day, when Gentiles would be given equal access to God’s house (Eph. 2:16-22). That glorious day when the doors of Messiah’s kingdom were opened and Cornelius and his family were admitted, saw the prophecy fulfilled in its last detail (Acts 11:15-18). Note that Gentiles would help in building up Jehovah’s temple. This is seen in the Christian age when the church primarily consists of Gentile disciples with only a sprinkling of Jews within it.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Questions about Fasting (7:1- 8:23)**

Chapters 7 and 8 relate the coming of a delegation of Jewish brethren from Bethel to Jerusalem to find answers to questions about certain fast days. This provided an occasion for Zechariah to deliver twelve oracles of instructions from God.

**“...in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of Jehovah came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chislev”** (7:1).

The fourth year of Darius was 518 B.C. The ninth month (Chislev) would be comparable to our December/January. Some two years had elapsed since Zechariah’s first visions (1:1). Work on the temple was well under way.

**“Now they of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemelech and their men, to entreat the favor of Jehovah, and to speak unto the priests of the house of Jehovah of hosts, and to the prophets, saying...”** (7: 2-3). Bethel was an ancient site with a mixed history. There Jacob saw the ladder extending into heaven and received God’s blessing (Gen. 28:11-22). There Jeroboam had erected his altar and golden calf (I Kings 12:28-33). Some of the returned exiles had resettled the place.

The citizens of Bethel sent Sherezzer and Regemelech and their men to inquire if they should continue to observe the fast in the fifth month? This had long been their custom. **“Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day, of the month... came Nebuzaradan...into Jerusalem. And he burned the house of Jehovah, and the king’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem...and brake down the**

walls..." (Jer. 52:12-14). Since that time, the survivors had remembered that day by fasting (See 7:5).

Weeping and separating themselves (7:3) is explained as fasting in 7:5. The **"separating"** was from food on the fast day.

The first of twelve divine messages then came to Zechariah. By inspiration he asked, **"When ye fasted and mourned....even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me...? And when ye eat, and when ye drink, do not ye eat for yourselves?"** (7:5-6). Two points are made:

1. It was they, not God, who had instituted the fasts under consideration.
2. The fasts were observed out of their own self pity and remorse. By observing them they had hoped to recover God's favor.

God had only instituted one official fast for the nation, that was the Day of Atonement observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev.16:29-30). The principle he sets forth is that human observances will always remain human, no matter how long they are observed. Being human, they have no spiritual value. This lesson is surely needed in the religious world of our day by those who put such great stock in their traditions.

Rather than concerning themselves with ordinances and services of their own making, they should **"hear the words of which Jehovah cried by the former prophets..."** (7:7). Faithfulness consists not in, multiplying ceremonies, but in diligently obeying the word of God revealed by his inspired spokesmen (See Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8-9). The **"former prophets"** were those who served prior to the Babylonian captivity; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, etc.

**"The South"** refers to that part of Judah known as the Negeb (the word means, the dry) and **"the lowland"** refers to the hill country between the mountains and the coastal plain, known as the Shephelah (7:7).

The second oracle points out that disobedience to God's law had been the cause of the punishment and exile of their fathers (7:8-14). The former prophets to which he had earlier referred them (See vs. 7) had said: **"Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the sojourner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart"** (7:9-10). In this statement he summarizes a portion of the moral instruction of the earlier prophets. For a sampling of their teaching (See Jeremiah 7:5-6, Micah 6:8).

In verse 11, he reminds them how their fathers had responded to the words of those former prophets. **“But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they might not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which Jehovah of hosts sent by his Spirit by the former prophets...”** (7:12). To **“pull away the shoulder”** literally describes an ox that refuses to accept the yoke of his master. Israel had been like the stubborn and rebellious youth. His father had placed his hand on their shoulder as he corrected him. In response, the young rebel pulled away from his father’s touch. Their hearts were hard as **adamant** stones, that is, a stone hard enough to smash other kinds of rock. It describes a thing of **“impenetrable hardness”** (Laetsch). This speaks of their hard-headed stubbornness (Ezek. 3:4-7). Such a hard heart would not yield to the divine instruction.

Verse 12 emphasizes that when they rejected God’s law spoken by His inspired teachers (the prophets), they rejected God himself. The verse is also an important declaration concerning the divine inspiration and authority of the prophets and their message. The words originated with Jehovah. They were transmitted to the prophets by the Holy Spirit and then delivered to the people in oral and written form. Paul, likewise, affirms that **“all scripture is given by inspiration of God”** (II Tim. 3:16). If the Scripture is inspired of God, it is of necessity inerrant and authoritative. In a day when skepticism toward Scripture prevails, in most of the old and large Protestant bodies, God’s people must be bold in upholding this grand doctrine.

**“Therefore there came great wrath from Jehovah of hosts. And it is come to pass that, as he cried, and they would not hear, so they shall cry, and I will not hear, said Jehovah of hosts; but I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they have not known”** (7:13-14).

**“Therefore”** draws a conclusion from what has been previously stated. Because when God, cried to them through his prophets, **“they would not hear, so they shall cry, and I (God) will not hear”** (7:13). Consequently, the Hebrews were scattered among the Gentile nations for seventy years and their land left desolate (7:13-14).

## **CHAPTER VIII**

The oracles continue in Chapter eight. They are short, consisting of one to three verses. He still is responding to the delegation from Bethel. In the seventh chapter, he looked to the past to identify the reason for their punishment, now he tells them what God has in store for their future.

**“Thus saith Jehovah, I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath” (8:2).** Sixteen times the prophet refers to Jehovah as the source of his message. In so doing, he is reassuring the Hebrews that the promises can be counted on for fulfillment.

God is **jealous for Zion**, not just in a small, limited fashion, but greatly so. Because he tenderly loves his people, he will execute great wrath upon their enemies who have oppressed them. He will also fully restore to her his divine blessings. His displeasure had been seen not only in the seventy years in exile but in the economic hardships imposed while his temple lay in ruins. Now that they had begun the temple a project, his blessings would be bestowed (See Haggai 1:5-13) God’s righteous jealousy is frequently mentioned in Scripture. (See Exodus 20:5; Joshua 24:19; Ezekiel 39:25; Joel 2:18).

**“Thus saith Jehovah; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, the holy mountain (8:3).** Ezekiel saw a vision of God leaving Zion because of their idolatry (Ezek. 8:3-9:11). Now that his temple was being restored, God declares **“I am returned.”** It had been necessary that Jerusalem be purged of its idolatry and iniquity before the holy God could return. Now that the Lord had washed away the filth of Zion and purged the blood guiltiness from Jerusalem by judgments of war and exile, he could return (See Isaiah 4:4) and dwell in her. Jerusalem would now be called the **“city of truth,”** that is, a faithful city (See Isaiah 1:21-24). Also true teaching and true worship would prevail in her since false prophets and false religious practices had been driven out (See Jeremiah 14:14). It would be called **“the holy mountain”** because sin has been purged out and the presence of Jehovah, in his temple, would sanctify it (Compare Exodus 3:5).

**“Thus saith Jehovah....there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem...and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing...” (8: 4-5).** This is a promise of peace for Jerusalem. She had been ravaged by war. Her streets were unsafe for the old and young. Now things would change. Peace would prevail. This promise was not unconditional, it hinged on their faithfulness to God (See Jeremiah 18:9-10). When a later generation rejected God’s Son he sent a horrible destructive war on them as punishment.

**“Thus saith Jehovah...If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine...?” (8: 6).**

Such glowing promises may have caused many to shake their heads in unbelief. It seemed impossible for the pitiful remnant to ever see prosperity in



their land. He reminds them that nothing is too hard for Jehovah (Gen. 18:14). This is an implied warning that they must trust God with absolute faith. **“The remnant of the people”** refers to the Hebrews who had returned from exile.

**“Thus saith Jehovah...Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west...I will bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God...” (8:7-8).** In this oracle three blessings as promised:

1. God will save his people from captivity;
2. He will bring them home to Jerusalem;
3. The covenant relationship will be restored as was first announced to Moses (Ex. 6:7).

The next oracle was spoken specifically to the temple workers. **“Thus saith Jehovah...Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets that were in the day that the foundation of the house of Jehovah...was laid, even the temple, that it might be built” (8:9).** We can see Zechariah and Haggai as they meet with the workers, delivering their words of encouragement; **“Let’s get on with building God’s house.”** They were the prophets the people had heard.

He then delivered the gladsome news that God had promised to lift the drought and economic depression because of their faithful obedience and would now send prosperity among them. **“For before those days there was no hire for men, nor any hire for beast, neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in, because of the adversary; for I set all men every one against his neighbor. But now I will not be unto the remnant of this people as in the former days, saith Jehovah...” (8:10-11).** Before the days of active labor on the temple, their economy was dead (no jobs) (See Haggai 1:6,10-11; 2:15-19). There had been civil unrest and hostilities that disrupted their society. But *now* things are going to get better.

**“For there shall be the seed of peace; the vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things. And it shall come to pass that as ye were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and ye shall be a blessing. Fear not but let your hands be strong” (8:12-13).** Peace and prosperity are promised as a reward for their obedience to God’s will. Because of their sin and judgment in the past, they were **“tossed to and fro among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil; to be a reproach and a proverb a taunt and a curse...” (Jer.**

24:9). Now, all of that is passed and men will marvel at their restoration to God's favor. Notice too that in the small band of survivors were the remnants of both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, now united as promised (Jer. 30:3).

**“For thus saith Jehovah... As I thought to do evil unto you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath... and I repented not, so again have I thought in these days to do good unto Jerusalem...” (8:14).** Since God has kept his promise to punish their disobedience in the past they could equally count on him keeping his word to now bless them.

**“These are the things that ye shall do: Speak ye every man the truth with his neighbor; and execute the judgement of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith Jehovah” (8:16-17).** The requirements God demanded of Zechariah's generation are the same as he expected in olden times. As is often the case, He lists a sampling of duties which stand representatively for all his will (See Psalm 15; 24:1-6, Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-40). Of the four things listed, two are positive and two are negative. They form a double antithetic parallel:

**“Speak ye every man the truth with his neighbor;”**

**“Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates”**

**“and let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbor”**

**“and love no false oath.”**

The charge to **“execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates”** refers to fairness and justice in their courts which were conducted at the gates of the city (Deut. 21:19). Fair and truthful judgments would make for peace (Ex. 18:21-23). **“False oaths”** in this place refers to perjury in such court cases (See Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

**“For all of these are things that I hate...”** In a day when *the love of God* is exalted on every hand, it would do the student well to note the things which God hates. (See Proverbs 6:16-19; Hebrews 1:9; Malachi 2:16).

**“Thus saith Jehovah...The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; Therefore love truth and peace” (8:19).** At last he returns to the question asked by the men from Bethel, concerning their fast days. He says that their fasts will be turned into feasts of celebration.

The fasts were all to commemorate the events connected with the fall of the nation to Babylon some seventy years before. In the fourth month, Babylon had breached the walls of Jerusalem and in the fifth month, the temple and principle buildings were burned (II Kings 25:8-9). In the seventh month Gedaliah was assassinated (Jer. 41:1-3). In the tenth month the siege of Jerusalem had begun (II Kings 25:1). Zechariah's divinely given message was that the days for sorrowing for the disasters of old are past. A new day of peace, prosperity and blessing has arrived and it should be reflected in joyful celebration.

**“Thus saith Jehovah...It shall yet come to pass that there shall come peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, let us go speedily to entreat the favor of Jehovah...I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of host in Jerusalem... (8:20-22).** To the struggling, discouraged remnant, Jehovah promises a glorious future day when multitudes will flock back to take their place in the restored nation. First, the people of 8:20-21 refer to more returning Hebrews. See the report in Ezra 7:1-7 and 8:1-14 of others who returned to the homeland.

Verse 22 extends the prediction to Gentiles as well. Seeing God's favor upon the Jews, they too will seek Jehovah. This was fulfilled in the great body of proselytes and god-fearers we read of in the New Testament (See Acts 10:1-2, 13:14-16, 13:43, 18:4 etc). Its ultimate fulfillment was seen in the eager reception of the gospel of Christ in Gentile nations of the world. In becoming Christians, they become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). They come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem which is the church (Heb. 12:22-23).

**“Thus saith Jehovah ... In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out all the languages of the nations, they shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying. We will go with you for we have heard that God is with you” (8:23).** This final oracle restates the messages of the previous ones, adding that ten Gentiles would cling to a Jew, determined to go with him that they may receive God's blessing. Ten is used here as a large but indefinite number (Compare Genesis 31:7, 24:55, etc). This would find its ultimate fulfillment in Messiah's day. Isaiah saw a similar vision when, in the latter days, all nations would flow unto Jehovah's house (Is.2:2-3).

This brings to a close the first major section of Zechariah's book. It has dealt mainly with the restoration of the Jewish nation and the rebuilding of God's temple. While there are some messianic promises, it was addressed to his

contemporaries to meet the needs of their immediate situation. Chapters 9-14 are of a different nature. They look mainly to the future and are heavily messianic. Of all the prophet's words, they are among the most difficult to properly interpret.

## CHAPTER IX

### **A Prophetic History of the Kingdom of God and the Enemies Thereof (9:1-14)**

This section consists of predictions of judgement on the enemies of the Hebrews. He presents them as **"the burden of Jehovah"** on the enemies of Judah and Himself (9:1-11,17). Jehovah will smite Judah's neighbors who have harassed her (9:1-8).

**"The burden of the word of Jehovah upon the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be its resting-place (for the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Jehovah); and Hamath, also, which bordereth thereon; Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise. And Tyre did build herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold the Lord will dispossess her, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire."**

**"The burden of the word of Jehovah upon..."** (9:1). **"Burden"** is frequently used by the prophets to describe messages of judgment. "It means to lift up the voice in proclamation...denouncing the sins of a people by pronouncing on them...a heavy judgment" (Homer Hailey). Judgments are pronounced against Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, all perennial enemies of Judah. These likely stand representatively for all of her enemies.

Hadrach, Damascus and Hamath were cities of Syria, Israel's northern neighbors. Hadrach is only mentioned here in Scripture and for a long time was unidentified. It is more generally identified with the ancient city of Hatarikka. We are sure of Damascus and Hamath and can thus safely assume, Hadrach to be a sister city to them. God's burden of judgment will rest upon Syria.

**"The eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is towards Jehovah"** (9:1b). In the Hebrew, these words susceptible of two meanings:

1. As in the ASV, men of all nations will look with amazement at Jehovah's judgments upon his enemies.

2. As rendered in the **Amplified Bible**, “for the Lord has an eye upon mankind and upon all the tribes of Israel” which implies his providential oversight and judgment of the nations.

The first seems to the author the most plausible here.

Judgments will come on Tyre and Sidon and the Phoenician nation (9:2-4). Three reasons are cited for Phoenicia’s punishment:

1. They were very wise (i.e. they thought themselves to be very wise) (See Ezekiel 28:3);
2. Tyre had built herself a stronghold (i.e. military defenses on her island that were considered impregnable);
3. She had heaped up silver as dust and gold as the mire of the streets.

The promise is that God would dispossess her, smite her power in the sea; and devour her with fire. The judgments pronounced against Syria were such as could be identified with several different calamities that accrued over the years, but those relating to Tyre and Sidon put the whole prophecy into focus. It refers to the conquest of Alexander the Great and his powerful Grecian army. Having shattered the Persian army at Issus, in 332 Alexander marched his troops into Syria. A detachment was dispatched to Damascus which opened her gates and surrendered. The larger body of troops moved into Phoenicia and took Sidon by surrender.

4. Tyre was set to resist. Situated on an island, a half mile off shore, she thought she could withstand Alexander’s assault. Heavy stone walls, standing 150 feet, surrounded the entire island (some 2½ miles). A second massive wall was built within. Every kind of military war equipment was on hand and ready for use. Her great navy of 150 ships could easily supply her every need. Already, she had withstood a five year siege by the Shalmaneser and the Assyrians; and a thirteen year siege by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonians. The Tyrians mocked Alexander when he demanded their surrender. A contemporary recorded that Alexander responded, “ye despise this land army through confidence in the place that ye dwell in is an island, but I will show you that ye dwell on a continent.” (As quoted in David Baron).

In the face of incredible hardships Alexander’s men laid a mole across the channel that enabled them to siege the island fortress. Within seven months Tyre fell. The conqueror ordered 2,000 of her defenders crucified. Another 6,000-8,000 more were massacred. The rest were sold into slavery. The city was then destroyed by fire (Pusey). Prophetic, references to Tyre are among

the most detailed and of all their fulfillment, the best documented. Students would do well to consider Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26:27-28 and Amos 1:9-10 for other prophecies relating to her.

**“Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also, and shall be sore pained; and Ekron, for her expectation shall be put to shame; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines”** (9:5-6). Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod were principal cities of Philistia (9:5-6). They too would fall to Alexander, only Gaza resisted the Grecians. After five months she fell and ten thousand of her people were slain, the rest were sold into slavery. Batis, her king, was tied to a chariot and dragged through the city till dead. **“And a bastard (race) shall dwell in Ashdod”** (9:6), i.e., a mixed or ignoble race would inhabit the town (Perowne).

**“And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth; and he also shall be a remnant for our God; and he shall be as a chieftain in Judah and Ekron as a Jebusite”** (9:7). The blood and abominations refer to the idolatrous sacrifices of the Philistines. Pagans, often ate the flesh unbled or drank the blood (Ps. 16:4). The Lord prohibited his people from this practice (Lev. 17:10-13). See Acts 15:20 where the prohibition is renewed in our Christian age. When their idolatrous practices are taken away, the Philistines will also be **“a remnant for our God.”** There is no historical record of the Philistines turning to the Mosaic system. As a distinct nation they had ceased to exist by New Testament times. Thus the prediction of their turning found its fulfillment when, they with others embraced Messiah and entered his kingdom.

**“He shall be as a chieftain in Judah,”** i.e., in Messiah’s kingdom. The descendants of the despised Philistines can fill the highest offices because they will have become Abraham’s children by faith (Gal. 3:27-29).

**“Ekron, (shall be) as a Jebusite.”** Jebusites were the original inhabitants of Jerusalem. Some of them became respected citizens of God’s nation (See II Samuel 24:18-24). As used by Zechariah, he means they will become God’s people like those who were citizens of Jerusalem (formerly Jebus). In years to come the Philistines who survived would become worshipers of Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews. Other enemies of Israel were destined to be exterminated, but the Philistines would be absorbed.

**“And I will encamp about my house against the army, that none pass through or return; and no oppressor shall pass through them anymore; for now I have seen with mine eyes”** (9:8). While Israel’s enemies will

be crushed by the Grecians, Jehovah will encamp around his house (i.e. his temple) and protect it from the invading army. This alludes to what God had done to protect Elisha and his servant (See II Kings 6:14-17). The record of God's providential protection of Jerusalem is preserved by Josephus. "Having taken Gaza, Alexander hastened to Jerusalem, intending to punish them for their loyalty to Persia. Jaddua the high priest, after sacrificing and prayer, opened the gates and led a multitudes of priests and citizens out to meet the conqueror. The multitudes were dressed in white, the high priest in his official robes and miter. When the high priest approached Alexander the mighty king bowed before him. When his general, Parmenis, asked Alexander the meaning of this, he responded that it was not Jaddua, but "the God whose High Priest he is I worship." He related that long before, he had seen such a man in a dream urging him to boldly move against the Persians. The crowds were astounded. Alexander went into the city and offered sacrifices at the temple, as the priest directed. He was shown Daniel's prophecies of his coming and rejoiced therein. He asked what favors they would ask of him and freely granted that they could observe their sacred laws and pay no tribute in the Sabbath year (Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* XI, 8:3-5).

**"For now have I seen with mine eyes"** (9:8c). God assures his people that he is aware of their circumstances and will be there to protect them (See Psalm 119:153; Isaiah 63:15).

The messianic king will come in a most unusual way (9:9-10). **"...thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass even upon a colt the foal of an ass"** (9:9). Having shown how God would save his people from Alexander without weapons of war, he then looks far into the future and predicts that Messiah would come as a king of peace. His reign would be one of justice, unlike most Oriental kings. Justice is an essential attribute of the righteous God (See Isaiah 45:21).

**"Having salvation."** The rendering of this phrase has prompted a wide range of discussion. Keil, explains that it means "endowed with salvation, help from God... or furnished with the assistance of God requisite for carrying on His government." Laetsch understands it to mean, "being saved, unfailingly delivered," that is, his victory over Satan and death is already established. Pusey takes it to mean that he obtained salvation to impart it to all his people. The RSV renders it "triumphant and victorious is he." Given the New Testament record of Messiah's coming, it seems best to understand it to mean, He came to save the lost. That, he declared to be his mission (Luke 19:10).

His coming would be markedly different from that of all other kings. While they would come on their war horses, having crushed their enemies, he would come, **“lowly and riding upon ...the foal of an ass.”** His lowly manner of coming is illustrated by his riding on the ass. In addition, he is set in contrast to the military kings of the world who came on horses or in chariots drawn thereby. The ass was a beast of burden. It was used by women and farmers. To appear on an ass meant anything but war. That this symbolized the peaceable nature of his kingdom is amplified by vs. 10 that speaks of the destruction of the implements of war and that **“he shall speak peace unto the nations.”** The fulfillment of this marvelous prophecy is recorded in Mark 11:1-10 and Matthew 21:1-11 There we are told that the foal on which he rode had never been ridden. This suggests two things:

1. That the unbroken creature recognized his Creator and submitted to him. Remember, all things were made through and by our Lord (John 1:3).
2. That it is proper that the Son of God not ride upon an animal that had been used for common purposes. (Compare I Chronicles 13:7).

When Jesus thus appeared, it taught a powerful lesson to the Jews. His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). He was not to be a warrior king like David, but a prince of peace (Is. 9:6). Unable to grasp the meaning, the Jewish mob shouted “Hosanna” i.e., save us now from the Romans.

Messiah’s dominion would be **“from sea to sea, and from the River (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth”** (9:10), i.e. it would be universal, in contrast to David’s kingdom and the Jewish state of Zechariah’s day.

Verses 9:11-17 promise that the Lord will save his people from their Grecian enemies. Looking beyond the days when Alexander would treat the Hebrews favorably, he sees the dark and painful days of oppression that would be imposed by Alexander’s successors the Seleucidae of Syria.

To the Hebrews he says, **“because of the blood of thy covenant I have set free thy prisoners from the pit wherein is no water”** (9:11). Blood sanctified and ratified the covenant made at Sinai (Ex. 24:5-8). It was not because of their merit, but because of God’s grace that they were delivered. Setting the prisoners free likely refers to their recent delivery from Babylonian captivity. Their situation was as hopeless as a prisoner cast into a pit or cistern. On their own strength, they could never have escaped. Such punishment seemed to be common in those days (See Genesis 37:24 and Jeremiah 38:6).



**“Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope...”** (9:12a) is spoken to Hebrews yet living in distant lands of captivity. They are encouraged to join their brothers who have returned and are rebuilding the nation. This **“stronghold”** probably refers to Jerusalem their principal city, which in olden days was a stronghold and would later be rebuilt as such (See II Samuel 5:7). **“The prisoners of hope”** were those Hebrews yet in captivity, who now have a basis for hope. They are free to return home. They yet loved the Lord and hoped in his promises. **“...I declare that I will render double unto thee”** (:12). God had rendered them a double portion of judgment for their sins (Is. 40:2). Now he would give her a double portion of blessings (Compare Job 42:10). The expression **“double”** is not to be taken literally, but as **“more than adequate.”**

**“For I have bent Judah for me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty man”** (9:13). He now looks into the distant future when the Hebrews would be faced with extermination at the hands of the Grecian ruler of Syria. Alexander not only wished to conquer and rule the world, he was dedicated to transplanting Grecian culture, language and religion in every nation. Upon Alexander’s early death, his kingdom was divided between his generals. War broke out between them for dominance. In the end, four great empires emerged from the ruins of Alexander’s kingdom. Two are of particular interest to our present study. Seleucus I took Syria and Ptolemy I took Egypt. Israel was the battle ground on which their contending dynasties fought.

Antiochus Epihanes of Syria (175-164 B.C.) made it as his goal to destroy the Jewish culture and religion and make all of them Hellenists. He profaned the temple and set up in its courts an image to Zeus. He ordered their scriptures destroyed, forbade circumcision and imposed severe penalties on all who sought to remain loyal to Jehovah. To deliver his people from this seemingly hopeless situation, God raised up Judas Maccabee and his brothers. Against incredible odds they defeated the Grecians and drove them out. The temple was purified and worship restored.

**“And Jehovah shall be seen over them; and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south. Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar”** (9:14-15). In vivid poetic imagery, Zechariah depicts Jehovah as a mighty warrior entering the battle on behalf

of his people. Judah is likened to his bow and Ephraim his arrow, the sons of Zion as the sword in his hand. Here we see Ephraim (principle tribe of the North) and Judah as one in God's hands. No longer were they a divided nation as before the exile. Continuing the military metaphor, God's arrows are as destructive as lightning bolts (Ps. 45:5). His troops are as irresistible as whirlwinds or tornados. **"Jehovah of hosts"** describes God as leader of the armies of heaven (Compare Revelation 19:11-16). God is seen **over them**, i.e., coming down from his heavenly abode to lead them, to shield and deliver them (Ps. 24:8). The prophet hears the Lord's trumpet sound and sees Israel's troops rush forward to victory (vs. 14-15).

The Hebrews will **"devour"** their enemies like a lion does his prey. The sling stones of their enemies will fall harmlessly at their feet and they shall walk over them because God is their shield. God's troops will shout in victory like men happy with wine. The blood of their Grecian enemies would be shed abundantly like that at the sacrificial altar. The bowls of the altar were used to gather the blood which was then sprinkled (Compare Leviticus 4:18, 30).

**"And Jehovah their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted on high over his land"** (9:16). As in ancient times, Jehovah will save his people and **"they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted on high over his land"** (9:16). While their enemies will be defeated and driven out in shame, God's people will be exalted and shine in glory as the precious stones of a king's crown (See Zephaniah 3:19-20).

**"For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins"** (9:17). While usually applied to God, the context and the footnotes suggest that it is Israel's goodness and beauty that he sees shining like the precious stones of a king's crown. (See Keil). Not only will they have victory over their enemies, they will have abundance and prosperity. Grain and new wine stand representative for prosperity. **"Virgins"** is paralleled to young men and in context means simply young women (See Amos 8:13).

## CHAPTER X

**The restoration of Israel will continue and succeed** (10:1-12). Chapter ten continues the oracle begun at 9:1. The entire chapter is devoted to the ongoing success of the restoration of the exiles to their homeland. The key that confirms this is verse 6 where God says **"I will bring them back; for I**

**have mercy upon them, and they shall be as though I had not cast them off...**” Also verse 10 speaks that same message.

**“Ask ye of Jehovah rain....and he will give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field”** (10:1). From Haggai’s account we learn that because they had neglected God’s house, God had caused the heavens to withhold the dew and the earth to withhold its fruit. He “called for a drought upon the land” and upon their crops (Hag. 1:10-11). When they demonstrated a serious determination to complete the temple project, God promised “from this day will I bless you” (Hag. 2:19). **“The latter rain”** fell in March and April and caused the grain to swell to proper maturity. While God sends his rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45), according to laws established at creation, yet he reserves the right to send or hold the moisture in particular situations. He expects us to pray for such blessings as an acknowledgment of our dependence upon him (See Ezekiel 36:29-30).

He warns them to be careful to look to the right source for their blessings. **“Ask God”** he said **“For the teraphim (idolatrous images) have spoken vanity and the diviners have seen a lie; and they have told false dreams, they comfort in vain”** (10:2). Two problem areas are warned against which leads us to conclude they were looking to these forbidden sources for help.

1. Some had appealed to their **“teraphim”** these were household idolatrous artifacts cast in human form. Some were small enough to be hidden in a camel’s saddle (Gen. 31:19, 34) some were as large as a man (I Sam. 19:13). They were vanity, i.e., worthless, and prayers said to them were in vain.
2. Some had appealed to **“diviners”** who claimed that they could see into the future by means of dreams (Jer. 29:8). Such diviners are variously identified as soothsayers, oracles and sorcerers. Such practices were forbidden by the law (Deut. 18:10-13). It was just such idolatrous foolishness that had caused their fathers to be expelled from God’s land and taken into captivity (Ezek. 22:28-31). So now, Zechariah reminds them of Jeremiah’s warning **“...hearken ye not to your (false) prophets, nor to your diviners nor to your dreamers nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers...”** (Jer. 27:9). They spoke lies and their comfort was vain. The fathers, having ignored the divine warnings and gone after the lying spokesmen of idolatry, had been afflicted and scattered as sheep with out a shepherd (10:2b).

God’s **“anger is kindled against the shepherds”** and the **“he-goats”** (10:3). He refers to the leaders and rulers of people (See Ezekiel 34:7; Jeremiah 50:8).

In this verse it is evident that **it was the leaders of the heathen nations** who had oppressed his people for seventy long years against whom God was angry.

**“For Jehovah of hosts hath visited his flock, the house of Judah”** (10:3b). It was God, not man who had brought about the release of his captive people. (See 4:6).

He **“will make them (his people) as his goodly horse in the battle”** (10:3c). The broken nation, weak as scattered sheep, would be transformed by their God into a powerful nation. As the horse is more powerful than the sheep, so with God’s help, the Hebrews would be stronger than their enemies. The imagery of a powerful and stately war horse was popular in that day. (Compare Job 39:19-25). It spoke of power, invincibility and importance to the champion who rode her. In this picture Jehovah is the great warrior who defends his people. Israel is his war horse.

**“From him (i.e. the house of Judah) shall come forth the corner stone, from him the nail, from him the battle bow, and from him every ruler together”** (10:4). Verse four emphasizes that God had designated Judah as the ruling tribe (Gen. 49:10) and David’s dynasty as rulers (II Sam. 7:12). The place for His temple was Mt. Zion in Judah. Now, in the restoration of the nation, those promises would be honored. These words were spoken for the remnant of the northern tribes who had been privileged to come home. For some 350 years they had resisted the leadership of Judah and David’s dynasty. God clearly explains to them that the cornerstone and nails (pegs) for rebuilding the temple, city and nation would come from Judah and the defense of the nation (battle bow) as well. Some see in these lines a messianic promise but the context does not suggest that application.

**“And they shall be as mighty men, treading down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall fight because Jehovah is with them; and the riders on horses shall be confounded”** (10:5). This looks to the rulers and warriors of Judah (10:4). Through God they will be victorious.

**“And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back; for I have mercy upon them; and they shall be as though I had not cast them off...”** (10:6). A remnant of the Northern Kingdom (the house of Joseph) would enjoy the privilege of restoration with Judah. This had been promised by the earlier prophets (See Ezek. 37:16-22). He states it here lest the survivors of the North despair or those of the South feel proud. As earlier stated, this verse provides the key that clearly identifies the restoration of Israel along with Judah.

**“And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as though wine; yea, their children shall see it and rejoice; their heart shall be glad in Jehovah” (10:7).** This enlarges on the previous verse. Those of the North, who return, will fill an honorable role. They will be like brave warriors, not as peasants or subjects of Judah. The jealousy and competition of the past will have forever vanished (See Isaiah 11:13). The children or descendants of those who were driven into exile will realize the fulfillment of God’s wonderful promises and rejoice.

**“I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them; and they shall increase...” (10: 8).** To hiss means to issue a signal or call such as we do by whistling. This commonly used illustration is that of a herdsman who signals his cattle by a shrill sound. In the island countries and Africa, the folks hiss where we Americans would whistle to stop a cab. In context, God will signal for his scattered children to return to Palestine and help in restoring and rebuilding the nation. The redemption was from captivity. They had been slaves to the rulers of Babylon. God redeemed them by breaking Babylon’s rule and then raising up Cyrus to send them home. This is reminiscent of Exodus 6:6 and Jeremiah 15:4. He promises that the little handful that had thus far returned would multiply greatly even as their fathers had multiplied in Egypt where seventy souls grew to an abundant multitude of more than two million. As God redeemed their fathers (Ex. 1:5-6), so would he now redeem them.

**“And I will sow them among the peoples; and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and shall return” (10:9).** This reminds us of Hosea 2:23 where God promised that after the scattering of his nation, he would “sow her unto me in the earth and I will have mercy upon her...” The picture is that of a farmer planting an abundance of seed that his field may be full of fruitful grain. All of this is written to encourage the small remnant that things will get better. Other exiles will join them. Josephus relates that by the time of Christ, Palestine’s was a very populous nation.

**“I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them” (10:10).** Egypt was the ancient land of captivity out of which God had delivered his people. Assyria had long held the Northern tribes. As God had saved the people from Pharaoh’s yoke, so will he complete his work of freeing the present captives. (Compare Hosea 9:3 and 11:11). Gilead on the east and Lebanon on the west suggest that all of the land will once again be filled with God’s people.

**“And he will pass through the sea of affliction, and will smite the waves in the sea, and all the depths of the Nile shall dry up; and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart” (10:11).** The prophet alludes to the Exodus from Egypt when God, through Moses, opened a path through the Red Sea that his children might escape. So now, every obstacle that stands before the exiles will be removed to ensure the possibility and safety of their return. The political power of Babylon had already been dissolved. Local problems and problems within the Persia government that blocked immigration would be resolved.

**“And I will strengthen them in Jehovah and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Jehovah” (10:12).** Though they were small in number, weak in resources and political power, yet the remnant would be strong in the Lord (See Jeremiah 16:19). **“Walking up and down in his name”** suggests they would live confidently and boldly in their home land because of God’s protection.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **Judgments that will come upon Israel for rejecting the Good Shepherd (11:1-17).**

Verses 1-3 of chapter eleven depict coming judgments upon the nation. Considered alone, they do not give a time frame, but after considering the rest of the chapter we see this judgment is tied to their rejection of Jesus, the good shepherd, and their insulting payment of thirty pieces of silver for his hire. This clearly identifies it with the rejection of Messiah and the judgments flowing therefrom.

**“Open thy doors O Lebanon, that the fire may devour the cedars. Wail, O fir tree, for the cedar is fallen, because the godly ones are destroyed; wail, O ye oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest is coming down. A voice of the wailing of the shepherds! For their glory is destroyed; a voice of the roaring of young lions! For the pride, of the Jordan is laid waste” (11:1-3).** This is a vivid poetic picture of the invasion of Palestine by the Romans whom God raised, up to destroy his rebellious people. As invading armies invariably came from the north, he sees Lebanon, Israel’s northern most region, subjected to the destruction of the invading hosts. Trees are personified and told to wail their devastation. The destruction progresses from north to south, covering all the land. First Lebanon and Bashan then the pasture lands of Bashan and Gilead and finally the Jordan valley are wasted. The fine timber of Lebanon

and Bashan was renowned and coveted by Israel's neighbors. Invading armies would eagerly harvest it for their own supplies some would be destroyed as acts of vandalism or punishment for their resistance (See Deuteronomy 20:19-20). Southerner's still recall Gen. Sherman's scorched earth policy. Lebanon was situated west of the Jordan and Bashan east. This likely implies that none would be spared.

**The glory of the shepherds** is their pasture land which would be destroyed, leaving nothing for their flocks (See Jeremiah 25:36). **"The pride of the Jordan"** was the lush bottom land of the Jordan Valley, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Filled with heavy under brush, in ancient times it was a favorite haunt of loins (Compare Jeremiah 12:5; 49:19; 50:44). In his vision every thing is laid waste in the coming war.

Verses 4-14 set forth the **causes** for the coming national judgment. The lesson is set forth in an acted out parable on allegory where Zechariah acts out the part of the good shepherd who is rejected by the Hebrews and who withdraws himself from them. The acting out of God's message seems to have been a common practice. (Compare Isaiah 20:2-4; Jeremiah 19:1-13; Ezekiel 4:1-15).

**"Thus said Jehovah my God: Feed the flock of slaughter, whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be Jehovah, for I am rich; and their own shepherds pity them not"** (11:4-5). He cites God as the author of his message, thus giving it divine authority. God instructs Zechariah **"to feed the flock of slaughter."** Verse 7 tells us that he **"fed the flock..."** from which we conclude that he proceeded to act out the message. The lesson speaks of sheep and shepherds, but is an allegory. God's people are the sheep and Messiah is the good shepherd. It is **"the flock of slaughter"** in that the sheep are destined for slaughter. They stand for the Hebrews about to be slaughtered as judgment for their sins. The people who **"slay them and hold themselves not guilty"** would be their ungodly and ruthless rulers; men such as Herod, and Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas, especially the former. Those words are reminiscent of Jeremiah 50:6-7. It is interesting that those who thus abused the Hebrews justified their so doing by claiming it was God's will. So did Rabshakeh the Assyrian (See Isaiah 36:10).

**"For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith Jehovah; but lo, I will deliver the men, every one into his neighbor's hand; and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them"** (11:6). Here the figurative language is dropped and he plainly says it is the **inhabitants of the land** that are to be punished. Also he points

out that a part of that judgment will be anarchy and civil strife. According to Josephus this was in fact the case in 70 A. D. when the Jewish nation fell to the Romans (**History of the Jewish War VI, 3:3-4**). God would deliver his rebellious people **“into the hand of his king”** i.e., the king they chose. When Pilate presented the Savior to the mob, **“the chief priests answered, we have no king but Caesar”** (John 19:15). God then delivered them unto Caesar for their due punishment. When their land was smitten, he sent no deliverer but allowed them to perish in great numbers and the survivors to be scattered to the far corners of the earth. (Compare Matthew 24:21-22).

**“So I fed the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty; and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock”** (11:7). We can see the prophet acting out his part as a good shepherd while he tended all **“the flock that was doomed to be slain”** (RSV). By **“the poor of the flock,”** he means, **“the most miserable of sheep** (See the footnote in the ASV). They were the obedient ones who responded to his leadership. To properly tend the sheep, the prophet took two staves. Such was common with shepherds. David mentions the Great Shepherd’s rod and staff (Ps. 23:4). With the long crooked staff a shepherd managed his flock with his heavier rod he drove away wild beasts. In this acted out lesson, each stick is given a name, perhaps it was engraved upon it. On one was written **“Beauty”** which meant **“Graciousness”** (see footnote) or Favor” (David Baron) which declared God’s grace and favor that had been showered upon them across the ages and was especially apparent in his sending the good shepherd, Messiah. **The only begotten Son of the Father (was) full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14). He was **“the grace of God”** that appeared to save man (Tit. 2:11). The other staff he called **“Bands”** which means **“binding, confederacy, or union.”** This staff signified the brotherhood between Judah and Israel...their national unity. (T. Laetsch).

**“And I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them and their soul also loathed me. Then saith I, I will not feed you; that which dieth, let it die and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let them that are left eat everyone the flesh of another”** (11:8-9). **“The three shepherds”** to be cut off has been a special challenge to expositors. According to H.C. Leupold, some forty different ideas have been set forth on the meaning. Since no specific identity is found in the text we can only concluded that they were unworthy leaders of the nation who had poorly served God’s people. Many take them to stand for prophets; priests and civil rulers but this view is not without difficulty. That they were to be cut off in one month means in a short period of time (See Hosea 5:7). This is a metonymy where the definite number stands for the indefinite.



**“For my soul was weary of them”** literally means that he grew impatient with the flock or was wearied with their responses. They in turned **“loathed”** Jehovah’s shepherd. The word expresses **“intense disgust”** (Baron). This was vividly illustrated in the attitude of the Jewish leadership and the mob in Jerusalem that cried out for Jesus’ blood (Matt. 26:66-68; 27:20-25).

Chapter 11:9 describes God’s rejection of the Hebrew people. Their immediate judgment was to be left to their own self-destruction. In their mad fury the Jews, trapped in Jerusalem and besieged by the Romans, slaughtered each other in large numbers. Without food, some of the starving Jews turned to cannibalism (Josephus, **History of the Jewish War**, VI, 3-4).

**“And I took my staff Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples. And it was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that gave heed unto me knew that it was the word of Jehovah”** (11:10-11). We can see the prophet publicly breaking his staff on which was written Beauty or Graciousness thus symbolizing the removal of God’s grace from the Hebrew nation. Now nothing stood between them and the wrath of their Roman enemies. In the words of Paul, national Israel would be cut off (Rom. 11:15). But **“the poor of the flock that gave heed”** to the good shepherd knew it was the word of the Lord. They were the righteous remnant of the nation, spiritual Israel, who embraced the Savior. They wept at his demise, rejoiced at his resurrection and gladly entered into his new, spiritual kingdom, his church. Jesus never expected all the Jews to follow him. He taught that many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:14). Paul noted it had always been only a faithful remnant that was loyal to God (Rom. 9:27-29). When **“the poor of the flock,”** i.e. the faithful remnant, saw all these things come to pass, they understood the prophecy of Zachariah was being fulfilled (See Luke 24:27, 44-47).

**“And I said unto them, if ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forebear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver. And Jehovah said unto me cast it unto the potter, the godly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of Jehovah”** (11:12-13). We must keep in mind that all of this is being acted out in a public way to convey the divine message to the people. We see the prophet in the role of the good shepherd. His mission now nearing its end, he asks them for his wages. There is no demand nor threat; he only asks that they place a value of his services. **“Thirty pieces of silver”** was the price they paid. That was the value placed on a slave gored to death by an ox (Ex. 21:32). This paltry sum was intended and taken as an insult as is reflected in his casting unto the potter.

**“Cast it unto the potter, the goodly price that I was prized at by them.”** The Hebrew words translated “cast it unto” suggest that it be thrown away as a thing vile and rejected, like the body of an animal torn by beasts was to be cast to the dogs” (Ex. 22:31). In that day and society, potters were among the lowest of the laboring class of people. **“The goodly price”** is dripping with irony and sarcasm. The word literally means magnificent or splendid but here it means the opposite, i.e. miserable or paltry.

Potters in Israel were among the lowest and poorest of the laboring classes. In the temple, the potter’s wares were used only for the most common and lowly purposes. His wares were cheap and easily replaced if shattered. The prophet’s casting the silver unto the potter was done **“in the house of Jehovah”** as a symbolic testimony to the people. It said as your posterity will one day reject God’s Messiah, the good shepherd, so God will reject you. He made the point that the contempt with which they received his son would witness against them when Jehovah pronounced judgment. Why the particular potter was in the temple at that time we are not told. Perhaps he was there to worship or to deliver his wares.

When we compare this with Matthew’s record of the fulfillment, we note the Judas received the thirty pieces of silver from the chief priests (Matt.26:14-16). When smitten in his conscience, Judas sought to return the money but they rejected it. So he cast it down in the sanctuary. Because it was blood money, the self-righteous priests acted appalled at receiving such a gift from a traitor. Thus they bought a potter’s field in which to bury strangers (Matt. 27:3-10). Matthew declares that this fulfilled the ancient prophecy.

A potter’s field can have two meanings: A field where the clay was dug for the potter’s use, hence a piece of land scarred and pitted, thus undesirable for other use; A field where the refuse of the potter’s work was deposited. Thus a great mass of broken, worthless pottery and shards accumulated, making the land useless and worthless for farming or pasturage. We see similar scenes today around the brick factories. Such a worthless piece of land was bought to bury those without money, friends or family. Today, the expression, “potter’s field,” has become proverbial of a pauper’s graveyard.

The following points in this prophesy can be discerned;

1. Before Jerusalem’s destruction, Messiah would come to the Hebrews as Jehovah’s good shepherd;
2. Only a small remnant of the people (the poor of the flock) would give heed to him. The leaders and the masses would scorn and reject him;

3. The Hebrews would show their contempt by valuing him as a gored slave worth only 30 pieces of silver in their estimate.
4. The money would be cast into the temple and used for something connected with a potter.
5. As the consequence of their rejection of Messiah, the Hebrews would be destroyed by civil strife within and conquest by heathen armies from without.

There is an apparent problem as Matthew, in chapter 27:9-10 of his book, records the fulfillment of this prophecy. He obviously quotes from Zechariah but attributes it to Jeremiah. Liberal scholars have been quick to point this out as a mistake on Matthew's part, which if true, would be a blow against the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy of the scripture. Either of the following explanations is satisfactory to explain the problem while maintaining our faith in the inspiration and inerrancy of the word.

1. Theo Laetsch suggests that "Matthew combines two prophecies, one from Zechariah 11:12-14 and the other from Jeremiah 32:6-8, ascribing both of them to the latter prophet."
2. David Baron theorizes, that in the original MS the name Zechariah may have stood in abbreviated form *Zpiov* in the Greek, which an early copyist mistook for *Ipriou*, the abbreviation for Jeremiah, which mistake was passed on in succeeding copies.
3. Baron also postulates that in the original text of Matthew, no name was attributed to the prophecy which is Matthew's common practice (See 1:22; 2:5-15; 13:35 etc), and that an early scribe made a double error by inserting a name not in the original and that a wrong one.
4. Alfred Edersheim says "the very spot on which Jeremiah had been divinely directed to prophesy against Jerusalem and against Israel (See Jeremiah 19:1-13), how was it now all fulfilled in the light of the completed sin and apostasy of the people, as prophetically described by Zachariah...and so St. Matthew, targuming this prophecy in form as in its spirit, and in true Jewish manner, stringing to it the prophetic description furnished by Zechariah, set the event before us as the fulfillment of Jeremy's prophecy."
5. Homer Hailey offers as a possible solution that the Book of Zechariah was part of a roll headed by Jeremiah's work, which roll was referred to by the title "Jeremiah."

**“Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel”** (11:14). This symbolic act signified the internal disintegration of the nation after the rejection of Messiah, the result of which was a vicious reign of terror within, while the mighty Roman armies besieged them from without.

**“And Jehovah said unto me take unto thee yet again the instruments of a foolish shepherd”** (11:15). The instruction continues as the prophet is instructed to act the part of a foolish shepherd. The instruments of a shepherd were few and simple: a bag, a wallet, a staff, a rod and a sling (I Sam. 17:40) and a musical pipe (Judg. 5:16). The difference between the instruments of good and foolish shepherds is not stated.

We can imagine him arrayed in a comical way, or behaving in some neglectful or perhaps cruel way towards his sheep. This the following lines suggest. Since they had rejected God’s good shepherd, they would now receive what they deserved.

**“For lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, who will not visit those that are cut off, neither will seek those that are scattered, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat sheep, and will tear their hooves in pieces** (11:16). The evil shepherd is not identified by the writer. The use of the masculine singular to refer to him suggests it was one person rather than a group of wicked rulers as in (11:5). We are reminded that in rejecting Christ, the Jews cried out to Pilate, “we have no king but Caesar (John 19:15-16). The bitterness of that choice is seen in the forty years that followed. The foolish shepherd did nothing for the sheep that should normally have been done. In contrast, he neglected, abused and destroyed them. Note that God would raise up the wicked shepherd, like he raised up Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:17) and Christ (Jer. 23:5).

The sheep who, were “cut off” were those that were lost (See the footnote). **Hooves torn in pieces** can describe the wearing away, of their hooves by mercilessly driving them over rocky terrain, or the tearing apart of the hooves to get the last morsel of food.

**“Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye darkened”** (11:17).

The shepherd’s arm that should have tended and protected God’s flock will be smitten and “clean dried up.” His eye, that should have looked after their needs, will be blinded by the Lord. If we are correct in identifying the wicked

shepherd as Rome, then we can see God's great judgment unleashed on that cruel nation as predicted by John in the Revelation and fulfilled in her history.

## CHAPTER XII

### **The Burden of Jehovah Concerning Israel (12:1-14:21).**

The final three chapters constitute the last burden or oracle of the prophet. In the previous oracle, the Lord foretold the utter destruction of both national Israel and her heathen enemies. In this section he speaks of a new spiritual Jerusalem that shall never be destroyed.

**“Thus saith Jehovah, who stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him” (12:1).** The surety of the following revelation is established by consideration of its divine author, Jehovah the creator of the heavens, the earth and mankind. Keil observes that God's forming of the spirit of man is “the continuous creative formation and guidance of the human spirit by the Spirit of God.” Thus, beginning with Adam, God has placed the spirit in every human being (Gen. 2:7).

**“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling unto all the peoples round about, and upon Judah also shall it be in the siege against Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples; all, that burden themselves with it shall be sore wounded; and all the nations of the earth shall be gathered together against it” (12:2-3).** To correctly interpret these lines, one must properly identify the Jerusalem of which he speaks. In scripture we read of old earthly Jerusalem, capital of the Jewish state and heavenly Jerusalem which is the church (Heb. 12:22-23). The time is identified by the expression **“in that day”** which is used some fourteen times in the oracle. **“In that day,”** they shall look unto Messiah whom they have pierced, and mourn (12:10-14). In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (13:1). From the events connected with the usages of the phrase it seems evident that it is the new heavenly or spiritual Jerusalem of which he speaks.

When wicked men or nations try to swallow up or devour this “New Jerusalem” God will cause them to reel and stagger like men who have consumed too much strong drink and are stupefied. To use another illustration, Jerusalem

will be like a stone which men thought they could easily remove, but which weighed so much that they were wounded in their endeavor.

**“In that day, saith Jehovah, I will smite every horse with terror, and his rider with madness; and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the peoples with blindness”** (12: 4). This continues the imagery of God so watching over his people in new Jerusalem that the efforts of her enemies to do her harm will be frustrated. He speaks of warriors on horseback, as war was fought in those days.

**“And the chieftains of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in Jehovah of host, their God. In that day will I make the chieftains of Judah like a pan of fire among wood, and like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour all the peoples round about, and they of Jerusalem shall yet again dwell in peace”** (12:5-7). **“The chieftains”** are the spiritual leaders of new Jerusalem. The strength they and their followers find is the strength of Jehovah (Compare Ephesians 6:10), not in temporal or military strength (See II Corinthians 10:3-5). God will make those leaders like fire among wood and dry sheaves of grain. They will utterly consume their enemies. New Jerusalem will stand forever (See Daniel 2:44). She is a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28-29). While their enemies will be destroyed, God’s people will be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

**“Jehovah also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified above Judah. In that day shall Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of Jehovah before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem”** (12:7-9). The reader is reminded to observe the continued use of **“in that day”** which ties all of these events together. *The obscure and difficult points must be interpreted in the light of the one clearly delineated.*

In Messiah’s day, God will save all of his people. The humble shepherd who dwells in tent as well as those of Jerusalem. It will be a matter of divine grace, not human merit. They will be no room for boasting. (See I Corinthians 1:26-29; Romans 4:16). The **“feeble”** man shall be as strong as David the mighty warrior. The house of David shall be as strong in leadership as was the angel that led Israel in the Exodus (Num. 20:16). The parallel lines declare the divinity of the angel of Jehovah **they shall be as God, as the angel of**

**Jehovah.** See the Appendix A for an extended discussion of this great angel. The heir of David that will lead spiritual Jerusalem is Messiah (Compare Luke 1:32-33). That we are correct in our application of this to New Jerusalem is seen in the fact that no historical events like this happened to literal Jerusalem in the day of Messiah's passion or thereafter.

**“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him...”** (12:10). The blessings which God promises are based upon heaven's grace and Israel's repentance for rejecting the Good Shepherd. They rejected their Messiah and, in so doing, they rejected God who sent him. (Matt. 10:40). As the Hebrews of Zechariah's day rejected the good shepherd, Jesus' contemporaries rejected and crucified him. John quotes Zechariah as he described the crucifixion **“They shall look on him whom they pierced”** (Zech. 12:10; John 19:37).

When they realize their awful sin of murdering God's Son and their Messiah, he predicts that they will weep bitterly. This was not true of all Hebrews, but it was the case of the righteous remnant (Acts 2:23, 36-37).

The prophet then describes the extent and degree of their mourning. **“In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart.....the family of the house of Levi... the family of the Shimeites ...all the families that remain...”** (12:11-14).

Most likely, the reference to the mourning of the Hadadrimmon refers to the mourning for good king Josiah who was killed in a battle against the Egyptians in Megiddo (II Kings 23:29). That was the occasion of great national mourning (II Chron. 35:22-25) Hadadrimmon is thought to have been a village of that region situated near Jezreel (Perowne). As the whole nation mourned for their beloved king, so the righteous remnant will mourn for the crucified Savior (Note Luke 23:27-30).

To show the great extent of the mourning, he lists those of the royal family, those of the prophets, those of the priesthood and then all the surviving families. The whole of the people would mourn. David is understood to represent **the ruling family**. Nathan most likely refers to the prophet by that name, and is **representative of the community of prophets**. He mentions Levi and the Shimeites, who were priests descended from Gershon a son

of Levi (Num. 3:17-18). They represented the priesthood. The wives are mentioned as mourning apart. This could refer to the segregation that the Jews practiced in worship and some other social gatherings or it might refer to the intense personal nature of the grief of those who realized that Jesus had died because of their sins.

### CHAPTER XIII

**“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness”** (13:1). **“In that day”** links this to the events of the twelfth chapter. It is Messiah’s day. They had pierced God’s Son, but now they realize the enormity of their sin. Having duly repented thereof, they now cry out for mercy and pardon. The prophet looks unto the distant future and sees the means of their cleansing. **“A fountain,”** a never ending source of water, busting forth from the ground. **“The term is never used of cisterns or stagnant pools”** (Laetsch). This fountain was not for thirst but for sin and uncleanness. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of healing waters that would cleanse the earth and give life and health to all they touched (Ezek. 47:1-12). This fountain shall be **opened**, i.e. accessible to all men everywhere. In no way would it be restricted. In the words of Christ, **“he that will, let him take the water of life freely”** (Rev. 22:17). The word fountain describes a place **“dug out”** which suggests that it was of easy access. This fountain **“shall never be closed.”** The Hebrew words mean not only **“shall be opened”** but **“shall remain open”** (David Baron).

The idea of a stream of water for sin and uncleanness looks back to the Levitical ordinances for its meaning. When the Levites were consecrated to their office, **“water of expiation”** was sprinkled upon them (Num. 8:7). For a ceremonially unclean person, the priest would take the ashes of the sin offering and running water and sprinkle it upon him for cleaning (Num. 19:17-18).

The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Messiah, who by his blood, shed on Calvary, is able to cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). **“The blood of Jesus his son cleanseth us from all sins”** (I John 1:7). In John 7:37-39, Jesus promised to give living water to all who come to him. The salvation his shed blood made possible was commissioned to be taken to every creature in all the world (Mark 16:15-16). The cleansing fountain was opened once, for all men and all times, at Calvary. The price has already been paid, but each individual must come and appropriate the benefits with himself (I Tim. 4:10).



The cleansing of the fountain would be open to “the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” This mention of royalty and commoners means that **all** could be cleansed thereby.

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of host, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered; and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land”** (13:2). **“In that day”** dates this, with all the other events of this oracle, in Messiah’s day. Idols will be cut off not in all the earth, but in Messiah’s kingdom (I John 5:21). This perennial curse of the Hebrews would forever be cast out of Messiah’s domain. Jehovah promises to cut off or destroy, not only the idols, but the very names thereof. Joshua had warned Israel not to “make mention of the name of their gods” (Josh. 23:7).

The prophets to be driven out are the **false prophets** that had plagued Israel for generations. That it is false prophets he has in mind, is seen in their linkage with idols, the unclean spirit and the following example of a false prophet. (So understand Baron, Keil, Pusey etc.). With the gift of “discerning of spirits” (I Cor.12:10), the early Christians could “prove the spirits (or the prophets), whether they are of God.” That enabled them to detect false teachers and reject them (I John 4:1). **“The unclean spirit”** is the spirit that encouraged false prophets in their evil work. (See I Kings 22:22-23, Revelation 16:13-14).

**“And it shall come to pass that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of Jehovah; and his father and his mother that begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth”** (13:3). He illustrates the righteous zeal of God’s people in Messiah’s day by the parent’s response to their son who is a false prophet. Moses had specified that even if a member of immediate family enticed them to strange gods, they should not pity or spare him, but “thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him to put him to death...” (Deut. 13:6-9). We would not expect a literal enforcement of this in Messiah’s kingdom it merely illustrates his point about the abhorrence of idolatry in that day.

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he prophesieth; neither shall they wear a hairy mantle to deceive; but he shall say, I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for I have been made a herdsman from my youth”** (13:4-5). In that coming day when Messiah would be pierced and the fountain for cleansing opened, false prophets would be ashamed to set themselves forward. Their lying predictions had failed to materialize. They were discredited. The

hairy mantle refers to the rough, coarse cloak that Elijah the prophet wore (I Kings 19:13; II Kings 1:8, see footnote). John the Baptist wore such a garment (Matt. 3:4). Evidently it had come to be a recognizable uniform for at least some of the prophets. So discredited would be the false prophets that they would deny any connection with the business, claiming instead to be farmers or even, a lowly, herdsmen.

**“And one shall say unto him what, are these wounds between thine arms? Then he shall answer those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends”** (13:6). Although the man would deny he is a false prophet, people would notice wounds on his body and inquire about them. The prophets of Baal would gash themselves until the blood gushed out as they called upon their god in their frenzied ceremonies (I Kings 18:28). In a vain attempt to avoid the consequences of the truth, the false prophet offers the feeble excuse that he was wounded in the house of his friends. Friends do not so wound their guest.

**“Awake O sword, against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow saith Jehovah of hosts; smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn my hand upon the little ones”** (13:7). Turning from the false prophets, he considers again God’s good shepherd and the Hebrew nation. The sword is personified and spoken to in poetic fashion. The sword is an emblem of bloodshed and death (Compare Jeremiah 47:6). The sword falls upon **“my shepherd”** saith Jehovah. This clearly takes us back to the good shepherd of Zech. 11:4-14. Jesus claimed to be **“the good shepherd”** (John 10:14). First, God calls him **“my shepherd”** to set him in contrast with the human shepherds who had done so great disservice to the nation. Ezekiel uses similar terms in condemning Israel’s sinful shepherds and predicts a day when God will raise up the shepherd of David’s lineage (Ezek. 34:1-24). God further identifies his shepherd as **“the man that is my fellow.”** The good shepherd is a man, yet he is God’s fellow or **“brother,”** meaning **“the nearest one”** (Baron). Only in Jesus, the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, do we, find such a person. In John 10, Jesus not only claimed to be the good shepherd but he also claimed that he **“and the Father are one”** (10:30). The Jews correctly understood him to claim godhood (John 10:33). Paul argued that in heaven, Jesus existed **“in the form of God,”** **“on an equality with God,”** but emptied himself **“taking the form of a servant being made in the likeness of men”** (Phil. 2:5-7).

**“Smite the shepherd”** is spoken to the sword. This kind of figurative language is called an **“Apostrophe.”** This is when a speaker **“addresses some absent person or thing...an inanimate object...”** (Word Quest). The sword stands as an

instrument for killing but it is not a prediction of how Messiah would be killed. God is said to order the smiting yet we know that the Jews and Pilate did the foul deed (Matt. 27:20, 22, 26). Peter explained to the Jews on Pentecost, Jesus, “being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless man did crucify and slay...” (Acts 2:23). Providentially, God used the violence of those wicked men to accomplish his divine purposes. In the words of David, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee” (Ps. 76:10).

The fulfillment of these lines is not in doubt, for Jesus cited these very words as he went out to the Mount of Olives on the night of his arrest (Matt. 26:31). In Zechariah’s book, the sheep scattered are the Jewish nation. (See 11:4-6). Following their rejection of Messiah, the scattering of the Hebrews was done by the Romans in the final Jewish war. Jesus specifically applies it to the scattering of his disciples upon his arrest (Mark 14:27-28). This is one of many cases of a prophecy having a dual application.

**“I will turn my hand upon the little ones.”** Commentators have given two opposite meanings to these words. Some see them as a promise that God will “turn” his hand of judgement away from his righteous remnant. Thus they are words of encouragement that after the scattering, he will gather the righteous remnant unto himself. Others, following the rendering of the NIV, “I will turn my hand against the little ones,” take it to mean that none of the Hebrews will escape the coming judgment. The context, specifically the following verses, favor the first interpretation.

**“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...”** (13:8-9). This was realized when the gospel of salvation was sent forth to the Jews and the Greeks (Rom. 1:16; I Cor.1:24). We see the first fruits of that gathering on Pentecost when three thousand Jews, with penitent hearts, gladly received his word were baptized in the name of Jesus and added to the church (Acts 2:41-47).

**“And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith Jehovah, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part into the fire and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name and I will hear them; I will say it is my people; and they shall say, Jehovah is my God”** (13:8-9). Here he describes the scattering and destruction of the Jewish people and the remnant that will be saved. Two-thirds destroyed

and one third saved should not be taken as the actual number. We have a synecdoche where the definite stands for an indefinite number. The idea of a small remnant of faithful servants being saved is frequently used in scripture. (See Isaiah 17:6, Jeremiah 23:3, Micah 2:12). The remnant is described by Paul in his letter to the Romans. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh." He proceeds to say, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart" (Rom. 2:28-29). In Galatians he says "if ye are Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

The remnant saved will still be refined as precious metal in the fire. Ezekiel uses similar imagery. (See Ezekiel 5:1-4, 11-12). The refinement by fire would be to purify and save rather than destroy them. Peter wrote to early Christians "ye have been put to grief in manifold trials that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold...proved by fire..." (I Pet. 1:6-7).

**"They shall call on God's name"** because they love and trust him and the Lord will acknowledge them as his. These words echo the promise made in Hosea 2:23 "...I will say unto them that were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." In Messiah's reign "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

## CHAPTER XIV

We now enter upon the most difficult section of Zechariah's book. Here the speculation of premillennial interpreters runs rampant. A few preliminary observations will be helpful to the student.

1. Remember that this chapter is a part of the oracle that begins at 12:1, thus the three chapters should be read as a single unit.
2. All three chapters are bound together in a common time frame by the frequent use of the expression **"in that day."** Nine times the phrase is used in the last three chapters. As already, shown it is Messiah's day. Hence the events of chapter 14 would most likely fall in that period.
3. In the previous chapter the author has shown how the Hebrews would reject and smite the Good Shepherd and later a remnant would realize their wrong and lament for so doing.

Upon that righteous minority God would pour forth the spirit of grace and salvation. A fountain of cleansing would be open to all the Hebrews and the remnant would come and receive its benefits. This would be Messiah's saving

death on the cross and the offer of salvation made possible thereby. Because they had rejected the savior, God would “smite the shepherd” and scatter the sheep. The majority of the Hebrews would be swept away but the remnant would be saved, though they would be tried as by fire. This would be those who would embrace Messiah and enter new Jerusalem, his church (Heb. 12:22-24). God scattered the Jews by the powerful Roman army under Titus in 70 A. D. Chapter 14 predicts this coming judgment on national Israel and the spiritual events that would flow therefrom.

### **The Coming Day of the Lord Against Jerusalem and the Triumph of his Kingdom (14:1-21).**

**“Behold a day of the Jehovah cometh when thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee” (14:1).** The word “behold” calls attention to a noteworthy future event in the nation’s history. In the prophets, a day of Jehovah “is a day when God intervenes in human history to execute judgment on upon men and nations. Afterwards events continue to unfold. (See Isaiah 13:1, 6; Jeremiah 30:7; Joel 2:1). It is a mistake to automatically assume that the phrase means the final end of the world, judgment. This is not to deny that in the New Testament, especially, the phrase can have end-time reference. These words are spoken to the citizens of Jerusalem. In the coming day of Jehovah’s judgment, the city will be taken and the invaders will divide the loot in the midst of the occupied city.

**“For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken and the houses rifled and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city” (14:2).** This war we understand to be that of the Romans against Jerusalem in 63-70 A.D. This has already been introduced in (13:7-9).

**“The city shall be taken the houses rifled (i.e., looted) and the women ravished (i.e., raped).”** Half the city will be taken captive. In the Jewish-Roman war historians relate that a million and a half Jews died by sword, pestilence and famine, multitudes were crucified and thousands were sold into slavery.

It is commonly objected that this judgment cannot refer to the Roman conquest because he says **“the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.”** While acknowledging the gravity of their point, the author would suggest that the remnant “not cut off,” could refer to the faithful followers of Messiah who on his instructions left the doomed city and fled to Pella (Luke 21:20-21). Or, it could refer to those disciples of the Lord who would then

constitute new spiritual Jerusalem, the church. This definitely seems to be the case in the subsequent portion of the chapter. Other interpretations offer no satisfactory consistent explanation to counter this. The expression “**half the city**” is not to be interpreted literally but as a large portion as in (13:8). The definite, stands for a large but indefinite number.

**“Then shall Jehovah go forth and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle”** (14:3). When the wicked Romans shall have accomplished God’s purposes on Israel, He will then fight against and destroy them. This great theme is often set forth in the Old Testament. It is clearly declared in Isaiah 10:5-7, 12-19. Having used Assyria to punish Northern Israel, God destroyed her by Babylon. Having used Babylon to punish Judah, God destroyed her by Persia so with the Romans.

**“As when he fought in the day of battle”** refers to some specific time in the past when God intervened on behalf of his people. Perhaps he thinks of God’s destruction of Pharaoh’s army (Ex. 14:13-14, 23-27). For this judgment, Moses praised God saying “Jehovah is a man of war” (Ex. 15:3). When Joshua’s men faced the armies of the Canaanite league, “Jehovah fought for Israel” (Josh. 10:14). So will God fight for his people “in that day” that was yet to come.

**“And his feet should stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the mount of Olives shall be cleft in the midst there of toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half the mountain shall remove toward the north and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee by the valley of my mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azel; yea ye shall flee like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah; and Jehovah my God shall come, and the holy ones with thee”**(14:4-5). Jehovah’s feet shall stand on the mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Like Moses, he will be watching over his people (Ex. 17:8-13). Also he stands there to provide a way of escape for his faithful children. In the prophetic vision, we see the mountain splint into and a valley of escape provided for those fleeing the besieged city. We should not expect to actually see a mountain split although the God who created the universe could easily do so. It may be an allusion to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt when the Red Sea stood as a barrier to their escape God divided it. In Zechariah 4:7, he similarly describes the removal of obstacles to the nation’s recovery as a great mountain becoming a plain. (See also Micah 1:4). Since this was to occur when the Romans would make war against Jerusalem, it most likely refers to Christ’s forewarning his disciples to flee the city at the approach of soldiers. They did so and found safety at Pella. The Jews who fortified themselves in

the city perished by the thousands. (See Luke 21:20-24). The greatness of the valley meant that all who wished to do so could readily escape.

The location of “Azal” is unknown. Some, like Laetsch, identify it with Bethazel mentioned in Micah 1:11. Obviously, as used here, it stands for a place of safety where those fleeing the besieged city would find refuge. They should flee the destruction of the coming war even as their fathers had fled the earthquake in Uzziah’s day. That destructive event is also mentioned in (Amos 1:1). It occurred sometime around 758 B.C. Some two hundred fifty years later, people were still familiar with and talking about it.

**“And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee”** (14:5b). When predicting Jerusalem’s coming destruction, Jesus said “they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). In Revelation 19:11-14, the Lord is seen going forth to war against his enemies and the armies of heaven follow him. The armies “with thee” refers to Christ. It is rendered with him by the Amplified Bible and the R.S.V. The rendering of the Amplified Bible clarifies the verse. “... and the Lord my (Zechariah’s) God shall come, and all the holy ones (saints and angels) with Him.” This is reinforced by Jude’s statement that “the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment upon all...” (Jude 14-15).

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, that there shall not be light; the bright ones shall withdraw themselves”** (14: 6). In the day of Messiah’s judgment on Jerusalem, “there shall not be light” which is explained by the parallel line, “the bright ones shall withdraw themselves.” **“The bright ones”** refer to heavenly luminaries which shall be darkened. This is a common prophetic description of the violent overthrow of the ruling powers of a state. Peter cites Joel’s prophecy “I will show wonders in the heavens above...the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood. Before the day of the day of the Lord come...” (Acts 2:19-20; Joel 2:30-31). This refers to the destruction of Jewish state. (See also Matthew 24:29-30, where similar language is used concerning the last days of national Israel).

**“but it shall be one day which is known unto Jehovah; not day and not night; but it shall come to pass that at evening time there shall be light”** (14: 7). “In that day...it shall be one day,” i.e. a unique day, unlike any other; unparalleled in history. While it is a mystery to human minds, God fully understands it because it is all part of his determinate counsel and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23). It is a unique day because it is not day and not night. Remember that we are viewing a symbolic prophetic vision not an

actual event. In the vision, the heavenly orbs that regulate day and night have been extinguished; hence we have a day of dreary doom. In the contextual flow, he is speaking of the day when Messiah destroys the Jewish state – her light will go out, but the situation is not hopeless. For **“at evening time there shall be light.”** By this, he means that out of the ruins of the old Jewish system the glorious light of the gospel will shine forth (II Cor. 4:3-6; II Pet. 1:19) and New Jerusalem will emerge in her glory.

**“And it shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea: in summer and in winter shall it be”** (14: 8). In that unique day when the old economy reaches its finish and the new age of the gospel is ushered in living waters shall go out from the heavenly Jerusalem. They will flow both to the east and to the west; hence encircling the earth. The living water is the salvation that Jesus offers mankind (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). No longer would God’s covenant blessings be reserved exclusively for the fleshly Israel. The gospel would be preached to every creature in all the world (Mark 16:15). The stream of salvation would flow in both summer and winter because Christ is the author of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). The symbol of a river of salvation flowing from Jerusalem is also used in Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 3:18 and Revelation 22:1.

**“And Jehovah shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall Jehovah be one, and his name one”** (14: 9). In the day when Messiah’s kingdom is established, Jehovah shall be king over all the earth. He will reign in the person of his Son, Jesus, who shares the divine nature with his Father (John 1:1, 14; 10:30). Today, Jesus is King of kings (I Tim. 6:15). He reigns at God’s right hand as David’s heir, Lord and Christ (Acts 2:29-36). He will reign until the end at which time he shall deliver the kingdom into the Father’s hands (I Cor. 15:24-25). Millennial doctrines that deny his present reign and the existence of his kingdom fall before these passages of Scripture.

In Messiah’s kingdom, all will recognize, honor and serve Jehovah above (Heb. 8:11; 11:6) and idolatry will be driven out (Zech. 13:2). For some 900 years Israel had tried to serve God while clinging to Baal and other Canaanite deities. In New Jerusalem such would not be the case. Only those who love and serve God with all their heart, soul and mind will be there (Matt. 22:37).



## LESSONS TO REMEMBER

- Prophetic preaching can revitalize the sagging faith of a people.
- A nation will not prosper so long as God's house lies in ruins.
- Only when we return to God will He return unto us (Zech. 1:3).
- We see God's wonderful providential care and provision for his people (1:14-21).
- It was always God's plan to bring all nations of men into his spiritual kingdom.
- Israel's conflict was actually with Satan rather than their neighbors (3:1).
- Only those who are spiritually clean can serve God acceptably (3:1-4).
- Zechariah looked to the writings of the former prophets as God's spokesmen and so should we (1:4).
- God's cause will always win, not by might nor by power, but by his Holy Spirit (4:6).
- Before God's work can prosper, sin must be put out of the hearts of his people (5:5-11).
- Christ, our high priest, now reigns on David's throne (6:12-13).
- God's blessings come to those who diligently obey his will (6:15).
- In God's sight, humanly devised religious observances never become more than that.
- Fasting and feasting are of no value unless united with justice, mercy, truth and righteousness (7:2-7).
- We see God, the good shepherd, anxious to feed, guide and protect his sheep, if they will but follow (11:7).
- Christ and his father knew long before his advent, that Calvary awaited him (11:12-13; 13: 1,7).
- Mountains of difficulty will be removed for God's faithful people (14:3-5).
- Some day the knowledge of salvation will reach unto all the earth (14:8).
- Those who refuse to enter God's kingdom cancel the blessing God has promised them (14:17).

## **APPENDIX A**

### **THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH**

One of the most fascinating and interesting personalities of the entire Bible is the angel of Jehovah. Perhaps no other Bible character is so little known or understood as he. Who is this angel of Jehovah? The answer to that question will be the object of our study.

#### **Characteristics of Angels**

To properly understand about this angel, we need to review the characteristics of angels in general. Angels are created beings. They were made through Christ in ancient times (Col. 1:16-17). Being creatures, angels are not divine in nature. They are not omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent. Angels are holy, but they are capable of sinning (II Pet. 2:4). Their very name indicates that they are messengers of God. Man is never allowed to worship angels, since only God may be properly worshiped (Rev. 22:8-9).

#### **Activities of the Angel of Jehovah**

In the Old Testament, we find at least 23 separate references to this angel's work for God's people. The angel of Jehovah appeared to Hagar, the handmaiden of Sarah as she wandered in the wilderness. He promised her a son and a large posterity. "And she called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her, Thou art a God that seeth..." (Gen. 16:7-14).

Jehovah appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Gen. 18:1-2). "He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him..." He fed his three guests a meal. One of them promised that Sarah would bear a son within a year (18:10). When Sarah laughed at the idea, he claimed that nothing was too hard for Jehovah (18:14). He told Abraham that he was come down to investigate the situation at Sodom. Abraham perceived that he was "the judge of all the earth" (18:25). After Abraham had secured a promise from the man concerning Sodom, "Jehovah went away" (18:32). Then we read that he (Jehovah) rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah "brimstone and fire..." (19:24). Notice that while he appeared to be an ordinary man, in reality it was Jehovah that visited Abraham that day.

Genesis 22:9-18 records the story of Abraham offering Isaac. Just as the patriarch lifted his hand to plunge the sacrificial knife into his only son, "the

angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven.” When Abraham saw the ram which had been provided, he called the place Jehovah-jireh (22:14). And the angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham a second time...and said, “By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah...” (22:16). He then renewed the covenant promise of the Messiah.

Genesis 28:10-17 tells of Jacob’s dream at Bethel. He saw a ladder set upon the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. “And behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold Jehovah stood above it...” (Footnote says that Jehovah stood beside him). Moses tells us in Genesis 31:11-13 that it was the angel of Jehovah that was the “God of Bethel” whom Jacob saw. When Jacob was returning to his homeland, he wrestled with a man throughout the night. The man said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel for thou hast striven with God... And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel for he said, I have seen God face to face...” (Gen. 32:22-30). Hosea later wrote of Jacob, “In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he had power with God, yea, he had power over the angel... even Jehovah, the God of hosts...” (Hos. 12:3-5). On his death bed, Jacob blest his sons by the name of God, the angel who had redeemed him from all evil (Gen. 48:15-16).

When Moses saw the burning bush, “The angel of Jehovah appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush...and when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush...and he said, draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” When asked by Moses what was his name, he was told that it was “I AM THAT I AM” who spoke with him (Ex. 3:2-14).

It was the “angel of God who went before the camp of Israel” when they made their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 14:19-20). Yet, in chapter 13:21 of the same book we are told that it was Jehovah who went before them in the pillar of cloud and fire. Concerning his angel, Jehovah warned Israel, “Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Take ye heed before him, and hearken unto his voice, provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgression: for my name is in him” (Ex. 23:20-23). Note that they had to obey the angel and that he could forgive their sins.

At the episode of the golden calf, God withdrew this special angel and only promised to send an ordinary angel. This so frightened and distressed Moses and the people that Moses fervently interceded for God to reconsider. Upon

their repentance, God did decide to send his special angel to once again lead them (Ex. 33:1-3, 12-16). Isaiah comments that this was the “the angel of his presence” that guided and protected them (63:9). The expression literally means “angel of his face.”

As Joshua prepared to march on Jericho, “he lifted upon his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.” When asked, the man replied that he was “prince of the hosts of Jehovah...and Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship...and the prince of Jehovah’s hosts said unto Joshua, put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy” (Josh. 5:13-15). Continuing the narrative in 6:2, we read that “Jehovah said unto Joshua.” So this man whom Joshua worshiped was in reality Jehovah.

Three times the book of Judges records appearances of this notable angel. He appeared to the nation at Bochim to reprove them for their disobedience (2:1-5). He appeared to Gideon to commission him to save Israel from Midian. Here again the angel is called Jehovah (6:11-14). In Judges thirteen, he appeared to Manoah and his wife and promised them a son...Samson. When Manoah offered him food to eat, the angel ordered him to “offer it unto Jehovah” as a sacrifice (13:16). “Manoah knew not that he was the angel of Jehovah. And Manoah said unto the angel of Jehovah, What is thy name, that, when thy words come to pass, we may do thee honor? And the angel of Jehovah said unto him, Wherefore asketh thou after my name, seeing it is wonderful?” (13:16-18). When the burnt offering was made, “the angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame of the altar” (13:20).

In II Kings 19:33-36, Jehovah promised to save Jerusalem and king Hezekiah from the armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. “The angel of Jehovah went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred four-score and five thousand...”

When David sinned by taking a military census of his nation, God sent a pestilence upon the nation by his angel. “And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of Jehovah standing between earth and heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.” David and the elders fell upon their faces and prayed (I Chron. 21: 9-30).

Daniel saw the angel of Jehovah in 533 B.C. while an exile in Babylon. He was “a man clothed in linen whose loins were girded with pure gold of Uphaz; his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as flaming torches, and his arms and his feet like unto burnished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.” Daniel felt

totally undone in his august presence. He had come to reveal the future of the nation to Daniel (10:5-14).

## **A SUMMARY OF FACTS ABOUT THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH**

We have seen that passages that begin with the angel of Jehovah as their subject commonly shift the names to "Jehovah, God or Lord" as in Exodus 3:2-6. The angel claims God's power and authority. He forgives sins (Ex. 23:4). But this only God can do (Mark 2:5-10). He revealed the future (Dan. 9:14). He had the power to judge, to save or destroy (I Chron. 21: 14-15). God's people are allowed to worship the angel. But we are strictly forbidden to worship an ordinary angel (Rev. 22:8-9).

## **WHO THEN IS THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH?**

He certainly is not a created being. He is not a man although he often appeared as a man. He is not merely a created angel. Nor is he God the Father, for John tells us that no man hath seen God at any time (John 1:18). Remember that the angel directed Manoah to worship another than himself (Judges 13:15).

The following observations will establish that this mighty angel was no less than the Word of God, the preincarnate Christ. The angel of Jehovah told Moses that his name was "I AM THAT I AM." Jesus also claimed that he was I AM (John 8:58).

The angel led Israel through the wilderness and provided their needs (Ex. 14:19-20). Moses reported that Jehovah directed Moses to smite the rock that the people might drink in the desert. But Paul tells us that the rock they drank of was Christ (I Cor. 10:24).

In the Book of Joshua, the angel is the prince or leader of Jehovah's host or army (5:14). In Revelation 19, we see the army of heaven and its notable leader. Then John sees his name which is "The Word of God" (19:11-16). In his Gospel, John identifies the Word of God as the only begotten of the Father, who became flesh (John 1:1-4,14).

The angel told Manoah that his name was wonderful (Judg. 13:16-18). Isaiah, in his famous prophecy of Messiah said, "His name shall be called Wonderful..." (9:6).

Isaiah calls him "The angel of God's presence," which means "of his face" (63:9). The Hebrew writer says Christ is "the very image of his (God's)

substance” (1:3). Edward Young says, “The angel of His face is the angel who is His face or in whom His face is made clear” (**The Book of Isaiah**, Vol. 3:p. 482).

Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending and Jehovah standing beside it (Footnote) (Gen. 28:13). Jesus declares himself to be that ladder (John 1:51).

The angel of Jehovah can be worshiped (Josh. 5:4). No mere man or created angel can be worshiped acceptably (Acts 10:25, 26; Rev. 22:8-9). But Jesus commonly accepted the worship of men (Matt. 28:17).

The angel is repeatedly called Jehovah. But Jesus is also called Jehovah. Isaiah affirms that there is no savior but Jehovah (43:11). But Paul describes Jesus as our great God and savior (Tit. 2:13). Therefore, Jesus is Jehovah. We do not affirm that Jesus is the Father. We simply recognize the fact that inspired writers ascribe the descriptive noun “Jehovah” to all three of the sacred Godhead. The word Jehovah describes a person who is eternal and self-existent. This is true of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Daniel saw the angel in his regal glory (10:5-6). John, the Apostle, saw the same glorious being on Patmos. He saw “one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breast with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace, and his voice as the voice of many waters...and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” It was the Son of God who had been crucified but resurrected (Rev. 1:12-18).

These appearances of the angel of Jehovah, in ancient times, are called **theophanies**, i.e., when God assumes the form of an angel or a man in order to speak and act visibly and audibly to men, to provide them some revelation or guidance.

These many references demonstrate that our Lord existed from eternity with the Father, just as John affirmed in his biography (John 1:1-3). They tell us of the Savior’s activities before he came as Jesus the Son of Mary. They reveal how he acted on behalf of the redeemed during those long years when mankind groped in darkness for a guiding hand. In the light of these scriptures let us honor and adore the Messiah who blest man in ancient times as the mighty Angel of Jehovah and now as Jesus of Nazareth.

**MALACHI:****THE MESSENGER OF JEHOVAH**

Ringling across the centuries we hear the voices of God's mighty men, the prophets of Israel. Though last in the book, not the least of them was Malachi, the messenger of Jehovah.

**The Historical Background**

Malachi's ministry spanned the years of c.a. 460-425 B.C. Mighty Persia dominated the eastern world. Artaxerxes was monarch of the Fertile Crescent. In 536 B.C. a tiny remnant of Hebrews had returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild their nation. Between 520 and 515 B.C. God's temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had greatly encouraged that work. In 458 Ezra had come to help reorganize and reestablish the nation's worship. Nehemiah came in 445 to lead the Hebrews in rebuilding the walls of their beloved Jerusalem. He returned to Persia and then made a second visit to Jerusalem in 432. Malachi's messages seemed to have been delivered between Nehemiah's two visits.

The situation in Jerusalem was pathetic. Religion had degenerated into a cold lifeless, formalism. Priests were corrupt and lax in their service. Unacceptable sacrifices were being offered to Jehovah. Skepticism pervaded society. Many Jews questioned if in fact they were God's chosen people. They were disheartened, disillusioned and decaying spiritually. They blamed God for all their ills. Perhaps they had not found the temporal benefits they had anticipated in returning to the homeland. This left them embittered. They refused to bring their proper tithes to the Lord. The holy covenant was held in low esteem and trampled under foot. Having sunk into a careless and sordid life style, they showed resentment and contempt towards their divine duties. Many had intermarried with heathen neighbors and divorce was common.

## About the Man

Nothing is known of Malachi save what is written in this book. His name is a shortened form of Malachiah. It means “messenger of Jehovah.” From his special emphasis of the word “messenger,” many have questioned if this was his given name or a description of his mission. He was a fearless reformer who spoke plainly to the sinners of his day. Fearing God as he did, he feared no man. His personality was strong and vigorous. He was keenly sensitive to the wickedness and negligence of his people. He was intensely patriotic. He faced and denounced the cold formalistic, external type of religion that was masquerading in the name of Jehovah’s worship.

His style of preaching is unique among the prophets. There was little of the poetic in him. Rather, he disputed with his audience as would a debater. Seven times he charges his people with error. Their objection is given with the introductory phrase “yet ye say.” He then answers their quibbles. He has been called “the Hebrew Socrates.” He possesses a vigor and force in his writing which few prophets surpass.

## His Message

At least five **purposes** are perceived in his short book.

1. He sought to encourage his disheartened people to be faithful to their holy calling. “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts” (3:7).
2. He wrote to show the abundant proof of God’s love. Only their sins hindered their full enjoyment thereof. “I have loved you, saith Jehovah” (1:2).
3. He reminded them of their ingratitude toward God. “A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if then I am a father, where is mine honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear saith Jehovah of hosts...” (1:6).
4. He wanted to prepare them for Messiah’s coming. “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, when ye desire, behold he cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts” (3:1).
5. He wished to correct their thinking about the coming day of the Lord and to prepare them for it. “For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be



stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah of hosts....but unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings...in the day that I make, saith Jehovah of hosts” (4:1-3).

Malachi is a valuable source of information on the political and religious history of the Hebrews in the 5th century, Persian period.

### **Keys to Proper Interpretation**

In every section of scripture certain keys will be found that are essential to a proper interpretation. The **key verses** of Malachi are (3:7), “Return unto me, and I will return with you, saith Jehovah of hosts.” (4:4-6), “Remember ye the law of Moses... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah...” The **key phrases** are, “saith Jehovah” and similar expressions which are used some 25 times in his 55 verses and “yet ye say.” This response of the people to his charges is seen ten times. The key thoughts are **remember, repent, and return**. With these keys the doors open and the mystery vanishes.

As we study the text, we should imagine the preacher in the gate of the city, preaching in the open air. He points the accusing finger and charges them with sin. The crowd questions him, objects to his charges and seeks to excuse themselves. As a skilled debater, Malachi takes each objection, gives it a penetrating analysis and answer and then moves to yet another point.

## **EXPOSITION OF MALACHI**

### **Their Destructive Doubt**

In 1:2-5 the prophet tackles the problem that was fundamental and the underlying cause of all their ills. Their hearts had grown hard and they actually doubted that they enjoyed a special relationship with Jehovah. First he proclaimed God’s love for Israel. **“I have loved you, saith Jehovah...”** (1:2). Immediately, someone responded **“wherein hast thou loved us?”** Malachi retorts, **“was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith Jehovah; yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated and made his mountains a desolation...”** He adds that Edom (the nation of Esau’s descendents) has been beaten down, never to rise to prominence again (1:4). His Hebrew audience had endured the Babylonian

defeat and seventy year exile and were back in their homeland. What more proof was needed of God's abiding love!

### **Corrupt Priests Denounced**

The second section of his message is a denunciation of the priests and Levites for their careless and corrupt leadership (1:6-2:9).

He reminds them, **“a son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if the I am a father, where is mine honor..saith Jehovah...”** (1:6). As the spiritual leaders of the nation, they, of all people, should have shown honor and respect for God. But they had not done so. They had dishonored God by offering **polluted bread** upon his altar (1:7). Defective and unacceptable animal sacrifices had been offered. **“And when ye offer the blind for sacrifice, it is no evil, and when ye offer the lame and sick it is no evil!”** (1:8). To these compromising priests, he hurls a biting challenge: **“Present it now to thy governor; will he be pleased with thee?”** The answer was obvious. The governor, had they bought such sorry animals to him as part of the tax payments, would have rejected them.

Charge upon charge is heaped against them. **“O priests, that despise my name”** (1:6). **“Ye say the table of Jehovah is contemptible”** (1:7). The priests received a portion of the sacrifices for their food. Those sorry priests had grown weary of eating the sacrificial food that was offered to God. They complained and grumbled. God took it as a personal offense (1:12-13).

All the nation's ills he lays at the feet of the spiritual leaders: **“This hath been by your means”** (1:9), i.e., the woes you are enduring are the consequence of your spiritual failures!

In one of the most poignant rebukes of the Scriptures, God shows just how repugnant their corrupted worship had become: **“Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand”** (1:10). The thinking soul wonders how many other times has the holy God of heaven been thus repulsed by the hypocrisy of those who come before him. How many worship services have been offered in vain. Jesus told the Pharisees of his day, **“In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men”** (Matt. 15:9).

Not comprehending that God's choice of them was in order to bring Messiah into the world that all might be blest, the Jews vainly thought they were a superior people in God's sight; that no others could be acceptable to Him.

Verse 11 of chapter one demolishes that false illusion. **“From furthest east to furthest west my name is great among the nations. Everywhere fragrant sacrifices and pure gifts are offered in my name; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts”** (New English Bible). Dr. Jack Lewis notes that the King James translators supplied the verb “be” three times in this verse, but the Hebrew does not express it. It more likely means that the Jews of the dispersion were showing more zeal for Jehovah’s worship than were those in Palestine. Even among the Gentiles many proselytes to Jehovah were being made. Their worship was pure and true in contrast to that confronted by Malachi!

Chapter one closes with the awesome words; **“cursed be the deceiver, who hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a blemished thing...”** (1:14). Frail and sinful man dares not trifle with the sacred things of the great I Am!

Chapter 2:1-9 expands upon his initial rebuke to the priests. Penalties are promised for their malfeasance.

**“And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith Jehovah...”** (2:1-2). They are singled out as a major part of the nation’s problem.

1. **“I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings”** (2:2). The very thought of God’s curse terrified every Jew (Deut. 28:15-68).
2. **“I will rebuke your seed”** or offspring (2:3).
3. **“I will spread dung upon your faces”** and thus humiliate you before the people (2:3).

God then contrasts Aaron and his fellow Levites with the sorry priests of Malachi’s day. This he does to emphasize how far short they had fallen. God originally chose the Levites to be his priestly tribe because;

1. They **“feared him and stood in awe of (his) name”** (2:5).
2. **“The law of truth was in their mouths, and unrighteousness was not found in their lips.”**
3. They **“walked with me in peace.”**
4. They **“turned many away from iniquity”** (2:6).

5. Since a priest is a messenger of Jehovah, the people **“should seek the law at his mouth”** and be properly taught God’s will (2:7).

Sadly, such was not the case in Malachi’s day. Rather than the above qualities:

1. They themselves had **“Turned aside out of the way”** of God.
2. They had **“caused many to stumble in the law”** by their poor example and perverse teaching.
3. They had **“corrupted the covenant of Levi,”** i.e., they had failed to meet their priestly duties and responsibilities (2:8).
4. They had shown **“respect of persons in the law”** and the administration thereof (2:9). Such was strictly forbidden (Lev. 19:15).

Because of their dismal failure to honor their sacred office, God said, **“Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways...”** (2:9). They were not only despised by God but by the people they were supposed to represent.

They were now reaping what they had sown in their irresponsible conduct (Gal. 6:7). How serious a matter it is to be a teacher of God’s people! No wonder James said **“Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment”** (James 3:1).

### **PROMISCUOUS DIVORCE AND MARRIAGE TO HEATHEN REBUKED**

The prophet then turned his attention to serious social evils of his people. They had **“profaned the holiness of Jehovah....and hath married the daughter of a foreign god”** (2:11). They had acted treacherously against the wives of their youth by putting them away through divorce (2:15-16). Some of them had been violent toward their mates. Such was inexcusable and demanded punishment. Marriage to the heathen was expressly forbidden by Moses’ law (Deut. 7:3). The sin was exacerbated when they divorced their faithful Hebrew wives probably because they were aging and then married younger, heathen women. Such was wrong on many counts:

1. It was treachery against their original mate (2:10).
2. It profaned the covenant of the fathers (2:10).
3. It was an abomination before God (2:11).
4. It profaned the holiness of Jehovah (2:11).

5. It nullified and discredited their worship (2:13). The tears of their broken-hearted women covered the altar of God thus discrediting their sacrifices (2:13).
6. It threatened God's plan to bring Messiah into the world through the Hebrew race (2:15).

"No higher word on marriage was ever spoken, except by Christ himself" (G. A. Smith). Their low views of marriage continued among some of the Jews even in Christ's day. Rabbi Hillel taught that a man may divorce his wife "even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, 'Because he hath found in her indecency in anything.'" Rabbi Kaibab wrote, "Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, 'and it shall be if she finds no favor in his eyes.'" Fortunately, many of the Hebrews followed the teaching of Rabbi Shammai who taught, "No one shall divorce his wife unless there shall have been found in her something unchaste." God's declaration desperately needs to be heard in America today. **"I hate putting away, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel"** (2:16a).

### **Moral Skepticism Rebuked**

Some had grown so skeptical that they said **"Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them; or where is the God of justice?"** (2:17). To which God responded, if it's justice you want, then justice you shall get. God's messenger of justice will come but it will not be what they expected. **"For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap; and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and refine them as gold and silver"** (3:1-3). They would be scrubbed as the fuller or laundryman scrubs the soiled cloth. They would have to endure the fire of purification as the ore is subjected to fire to separate the precious metal from the worthless rock.

And he **"will come near to (them) to judgment: and ...be a swift witness against the sorcerers,...the adulterers,...the false swearers,...and...those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the sojourner from his right, and fear not me, saith Jehovah"** (3:5-6). What a shameful catalogue of sins he cited. They were common among God's people. They talked of a day of Jehovah when he would come with more prosperity and good things for them. The prophet clarifies their thinking; the day would be one of purging judgment on sinners like themselves. Only the righteous would see it as a day of gladness (3:3-4).

This grand passage is also Messianic for Christ himself applied the words of 3:1 to John the Baptist, his forerunner (Matt. 11:10-11). Thus Jesus was the Lord who came to his temple, the messenger of the covenant who came to purify his people and restore a proper worship among the people (3:1-4).

### **A Rebuke for Withholding Tithes**

The prophet told them they needed to repent and return unto God (3:7). They asked **“what have we done?”** His pointed reply pricked their hard hearts. **“You have robbed God.”** **“Wherein?”** they demanded! **“In tithes and offerings”** he charged (3:8).

From ancient times God had taught them **“the tenth shall be holy unto Jehovah”** (Lev. 7:32b). Because they had kept back part of God’s tithe, he had withheld his blessings. Now they were in a desperate condition, but it was their own doing. How many modern day Christians are struggling financially because they have withheld God’s portion. When will men learn that if we give unto him, God will give unto us, **“good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.....For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again?”** (Luke 6:38).

God’s messenger lays before them a challenge. **“Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house.....and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”** (3:10). This is much more than a challenge, it is a wonderful promise from the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17) that He will reward the worshiper who honors Him with his gifts and offerings.

### **Demoralizers Rebuked**

Some **stout words** had been spoken against Jehovah. When challenged for specifics, Malachi named them. Some said:

1. **“It is vain (or useless) to serve God.”**
2. **“What profit is it that we have kept his charge?”**
3. What profit is it **“that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah....?”** (i.e. denied themselves worldly pleasures or perhaps fasted.)
4. The wicked have prospered as well as we (3:13-15).

How soon their ungrateful souls had forgotten all of God's blessings; chief of which was freedom from captivity and return to their homeland. As Jeremiah put it, how dare the clay to complain of the potter's use of it? (Jer. 18:1-2).

Chapter 3:16-18 shows the blessed result of Malachi's faithful preaching. **"Then they that feared Jehovah spoke one with another; and Jehovah hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared Jehovah....and they shall be mine saith Jehovah.....and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him..."** (3:16-17). He reproved, rebuked and exhorted his stumbling brethren (II Tim. 4:2) and some of them received with meekness the implanted word which was able to save their souls (Jas. 1:21).

**"In the day"** of judgment that God would send upon them, a separation would be made **"between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not"** (3:18).

**"For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah...that it shall leave them neither root nor branch"** (4:1-2). As we see today, some in the land of Judea were heard saying they hoped for the day of Lord. Some who uttered this wish were wicked in their personal lives and their religious profession. Malachi reminds that that when the day of the Lord comes, the wicked would be burned as stubble and only the righteous would **"go forth, and gambol (jumping for joy) as calves (freed from) the stall"** (4:1-3). The wicked would be utterly consumed, root and branch. Thus for their own good they had better repent and turn back to God before that great and terrible day arrived.

For the faithful, **"the sun of righteousness would arise with healing in its wings** (4:2). Since the days of Miles Coverdale these words have been applied to Jesus. However, the Hebrew has the feminine pronoun, "her wings" to accompany the feminine "sun." The meaning is, the day of judgment would be a day of fiery destruction for the wicked but a new day of blessed hope for the righteous. Before Messiah would come, the Hebrews had yet again to pass through the fiery furnace of affliction.

### **His Closing Exhortation**

In his final words God's messenger exhorts his fellow Hebrews to **"remember... The law of Moses."** The word of God was a lamp to their feet and a light to their pathway to guide the nation safely through the troublous times to come

(Ps. 119:105). By laying His word up in their hearts, and following its sacred precepts, they would overcome sin (Ps. 119:11). So long as Israel honored the Holy Scripture, she prospered. Whenever she turned away from it, disaster swiftly came. While we are not subject to the Mosaic law, we Christians must remember and keep the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), who will judge and reward us in the great and terrible day of the Lord that is yet to come (Acts 17:30-31).

The last word is a divine promise to send **“Elijah the prophet”** to them **“before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come”** (4:5). Jesus tells us that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy (Matt. 17:10-13). He came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Like Elijah, John lived an ascetic life. He both dressed like the Elijah and preached as did the great prophet from the past. It is remarkable that some folks think that Elijah must personally reappear on earth before the day of final judgment.

The great and terrible day of which Malachi writes would almost certainly be the awful judgment sent upon the Jews when God destroyed their nation, the holy city and even his temple by the ruthless Romans. Thus would end a stormy and rebellious relationship God had endured for 1500 long years. He tolerated the sinful Hebrews because of the faithful remnant that was among them. It was from that remnant his Son was born and to them he brought salvation. From them he gleaned the handful of righteous souls to whom all yet to be saved were added (Acts 1:15; 2:41,47).

**“Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”** (4:6). All Jews knew the meaning of God smiting the earth with a curse. He had done so in the days of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:17). The many miseries of life, their struggle for survival and sickness and death were daily reminders of the curse God had pronounced on the earth. It is interesting that in their synagogues, Jews still read verse 5 again after reading chapter 4:6, lest they end the reading of God’s word with a curse. We can rejoice that our new covenant ends with a blessing (Rev. 22:21).

### **Final Thoughts**

With these words, the curtain falls on inspired prophecy and 400 years of silence settles upon the covenant people. It was finally lifted with the coming of John the Baptist who called on all to repent and be baptized for the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matt. 3:2; Luke 3:3), “to make ready the way of the Lord” (Luke 3:4).



**Rather than the end of the Old Testament, we should think of Malachi as a bridge uniting God's two covenants. G. Campbell Morgan well said, Malachi "is a picture of a people who imagine that they are all right when they are all wrong."**

## **LESSONS TO REMEMBER**

- **An inadequate view of God will result in unacceptable worship.**
- **When worship is a wearisome thing to be snuffed at, spiritual paralysis will follow (1:13).**
- **Insincerity in worship insults God (1:8-10). Empty worship is worse than no worship at all. It would be better to close the house of worship than to offer such to the Almighty!**
- **Those who live in willful sin need not expect to please God with costly sacrifices and elaborate ritual.**
- **When God's ministers compromise the faith, it has a corrupting effect on the worshipers (2:8).**
- **When teachers fail to study and faithfully teach God's truth and morality, the people suffer accordingly.**
- **God supplies our material blessings according to our standard of giving to him (3:10-11).**
- **Our spiritual health can be assessed by the way we give to God.**
- **Cheap religion avails nothing and sacrifices grudgingly given are rejected by heaven.**
- **Each of us determines whether the day of the Lord will be a blessing or a curse for us (4:1-2).**
- **God wants stable homes. He hates divorce (2:16).**
- **Disregard for marriage vows is disastrous for the individual, society and the nation.**



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**John Waddey** is a native of Nashville, Tennessee. In 1955, he confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized by George Prosser at the Woodbine Church of Christ in Nashville. His maternal grandfather served as an elder of that church. His first sermon was preached in 1956. He was awarded the B.S. degree from Southern Christian University, but much of his education has come from independent reading and study. He has served congregations in Mississippi, Colorado, and



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Since 1964, John has conducted an extensive writing ministry along with his local work. For many years, he has written a weekly newspaper sermon. Hundreds of his letters to editors have been published. His pieces have appeared in a dozen or more of our brotherhood journals. He has authored more than 3,500 articles and 58 books covering a wide range of subjects. Several more books are forthcoming. He has served as editor of the *Star Bible Magazine* and *The Christian Bible Teacher*. Presently he edits *Christianity: Then and Now* and maintains teaching websites at [www.christianity-then-and-now.com](http://www.christianity-then-and-now.com) and [www.firstcenturychristian.com](http://www.firstcenturychristian.com). He may be contacted at 12630 W. Foxfire Dr., Sun City West, AZ 85375 or by e-mail at [johnwaddey@aol.com](mailto:johnwaddey@aol.com).