

The Minor Prophets

The 1990

POWER



Lectures

Hosted by the Southaven church of Christ,
Southaven, Mississippi

Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins
Editors

Copyright © 1990, 2000
Southaven church of Christ
POWER Publications

Preface

In August of 1990, the 2nd annual POWER lectureship was conducted by the Southaven church of Christ. The theme for the lectureship was “The Minor Prophets.” Thirty-six different Gospel preachers contributed to this effort, with both oral and written presentations. The written presentations are contained in this volume.

Under the capable oversight of editors Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins, the first printing of the lectureship book on “The Minor Prophets” was warmly received and widely distributed. In fact, the book sold out and has been out of print for well over a year now.

Due to repeated requests from brethren for the book, the present elders of the Southaven church of Christ have decided to reprint this outstanding resource.

The content of the book is the same, but the book has been reformatted. Special thanks to Geraldine Chaney, who scanned in each page of the previous volume so that we would have something to work with in typesetting the updated edition. Also, a mountain of gratitude is extended to Robin Smith, a young college student, and a member of the Southaven church of Christ. He volunteered his Spring Break week from college to assist in typesetting and producing the book. Moreover, he willingly gave up almost a month of his summer vacation to help finish the project.

My only contribution to this book has been to read each chapter carefully to try and make sure that no errors from scanning or typesetting have crept into the final version of this second printing. It has been well worth my time to read the book. You will be richly rewarded by the work of brother Warren, brother Elkins, and all those who contributed to this priceless collection of information.

--B. J. Clarke
J uly 12th, 2000

Foreword

The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Sam. 23:2; Psm. 119:89; Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25). Since all of the Bible is inspired it follows that the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are inspired of God.

The “minor prophets” are rich in predictive prophecy concerning the kingdom of God, which is the church of our Lord. This makes them exceedingly valuable. They also abound with great teaching concerning obedience and the necessity of holiness. They are rich in great principles, which, when applied, will make one righteous.

Atheists hate the supernatural element in the Word. Many young men when they attend various colleges, and universities, sit at the feet of modernistic professors who scoff at the fact of the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. This results in the loss of the faith of many of their students. These colleges and universities include many state schools, and also private religious colleges and universities. It is sad, but true, that several colleges and universities that are operated by those who are members of the church advance doctrinal liberalism. However, in spite of all opposition let us ever remember that “...the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

We are living under the New Testament (Col. 2:14-16; Eph. 2:15-16; Heb. 10:9-10; Heb. 7:12). Although some insight is set out in the Old Testament in regard to these matters, life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). However, we learn great lessons from the Old Testament, and this is particularly true in a study of the prophets. Paul wrote, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might

have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Though the “minor prophets” were written long ago, the principles that they set out therein are more up-to-date than tomorrow’s newspaper!

This book is sent forth, and the lectureship was conducted, with the knowledge that we are under the New Testament (Heb. 9:15-17), but with the full assurance that the great principles of the Old Testament are of great importance to us. God’s nature does not change (Mal. 3:6), though He has had different laws that applied to people in the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian Dispensations (Gen. 12:1-4; Heb. 1:1-2; Col. 2:14; Heb. 7:12).

Some of the most capable, talented, and faithful preachers in the brotherhood have contributed to this book. We are grateful to know that there are numerous brethren equally qualified who are not included, simply because we could not use everyone. Among the contributors is brother Rex A. Turner, who, as of June, 1990 has preached fifty-nine years. During all of his preaching life he has studied the prophets, and for the last forty years he has engaged in a detailed study of the prophets in a class room setting. His chapter, **An Overview of the Prophets**, is priceless, and would be worth the cost of the book.

Each speaker (writer) is responsible for his own chapter (and speech). However, we have confidence in each and every speaker that he is a man who loves God, and the truth of God, and that he wants to faithfully preach what the Bible teaches.

This is the second book that we have co-edited since we began to work under the oversight of the elders of the Southaven church of Christ. Last year’s book entitled **The Providence of God** has been widely distributed, warmly, and enthusiastically received. For this we are humbly grateful. This book is not our second work together. For the past fifteen years we have co-edited fifteen books, and co-directed fifteen lectureships.

Our work together has been mutually satisfactory, uplifting, and edifying. Our relationship has been pleasant

and profitable in every way, and we trust that our efforts have pleased our heavenly Father. We rejoice to believe that it has been of value to the Lord, the church, and to the lost. To God be the glory for whatever good results from our combined efforts. We believe that this book, **The Minor Prophets** deserves, and will be given wide distribution and use.

We are also grateful for the marvelous reception that has been given to the **POWER** journal which is published by the Southaven church of Christ, with Garland Elkins as Editor, and Thomas B. Warren as Consulting Editor.

We are grateful and encouraged to know that God said, "...So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void" (Isa. 55:11).

Garland Elkins
Thomas B. Warren

Table Of Contents

Chapter 1

An Overview Of The Minor Prophets

Rex A. Turner.....13

Chapter 2

Introduction To The Book Of Hosea

Rex A. Turner.....47

Chapter 3

Commentary On The Book Of Hosea

Garland Elkins.....51

Chapter 4

Great Lessons From The Book Of Hosea

Bill Jackson.....81

Chapter 5

Introduction To The Book Of Joel

Curtis A. Cates.....88

Chapter 6

Commentary On The Book Of Joel

W. Terry Varner.....101

Chapter 7

Great Lessons From The Book Of Joel

Harrell Davidson.....118

Chapter 8

Introduction To The Book Of Amos

Jerry Moffitt.....125

Chapter 9

Commentary On The Book Of Amos

Charles R. Williams.....132

Chapter 10

Great Lessons From The Book Of Amos

Michael Gifford.....149

Chapter 11

Introduction To The Book Of Obadiah

Thomas F. Eaves, Sr......155

Chapter 12

Commentary On The Book Of Obadiah

Wayne Coats.....162

Chapter 13

Great Lessons From The Book Of Obadiah

Lynn Matheny.....182

Chapter 14

Introduction To The Book Of Jonah

Roger Jackson.....191

Chapter 15

Commentary On The Book Of Jonah

Perry Hall.....199

Chapter 16	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Jonah	
<i>Paul Kidwell, Sr.</i>	217
Chapter 17	
Introduction To The Book Of Micah	
<i>J. K. Gossett</i>	227
Chapter 18	
Commentary On The Book Of Micah	
<i>Dub McClish</i>	234
Chapter 19	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Micah	
<i>Gary Colley</i>	259
Chapter 20	
Introduction To The Book Of Nahum	
<i>Mac Deaver</i>	266
Chapter 21	
Commentary On The Book Of Nahum	
<i>H. A. (Buster) Dobbs</i>	271
Chapter 22	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Nahum	
<i>Joe Gilmore</i>	287
Chapter 23	
Introduction To The Book Of Habakkuk	
<i>Stephen Wiggins</i>	294

Chapter 24	
Commentary On The Book Of Habakkuk	
<i>Bill Lockwood</i>	300
 Chapter 25	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Habakkuk	
<i>M. H. Tucker</i>	314
 Chapter 26	
Introduction To The Book Of Zephaniah	
<i>Clarence Lavender</i>	320
 Chapter 27	
Commentary On The Book Of Zephaniah	
<i>Darrell Conley</i>	325
 Chapter 28	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Zephaniah	
<i>Andrew Connally</i>	338
 Chapter 29	
Introduction To The Book Of Haggai	
<i>Goebel Music</i>	347
 Chapter 30	
Commentary On The Book Of Haggai	
<i>Joseph Meador</i>	356
 Chapter 31	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Haggai	
<i>Gary McDade</i>	365

Chapter 32	
Introduction To The Book Of Zechariah	
<i>Keith A. Mosher, Sr.</i>	374
Chapter 33	
Commentary On The Book Of Zechariah	
<i>Robert R. Taylor, Jr.</i>	382
Chapter 34	
Great Lessons From The Book Of Zechariah	
<i>Kenneth L. Jones</i>	410
Chapter 35	
Introduction To The Book Of Malachi	
<i>Foy L. Smith</i>	420
Chapter 36	
Commentary On The Book Of Malachi	
<i>Roy Deaver</i>	428
Chapter 37	
Commentary On The Book Of Malachi	
<i>Thomas B. Warren</i>	452

Intentionally Blank

CHAPTER 1

An Overview Of The Minor Prophets

Rex A. Turner

Introduction

THE ASSIGNMENT, “AN OVERVIEW of the Minor Prophets,” is not intended to be a speech to be delivered orally during the lecture program week; but rather the intent is to give an overview of the entire lot of the “**minor**” prophets. The term “**minor prophets**,” is for the most part an unfortunate designation. The very nature of the designation allows for the concept of a second or third-rate message when compared to the message, or messages, of the “**major prophets**,” which concept is not true in a single case. The terms “major” and “minor” prophets simply indicate that the “major” prophets spoke and/or wrote over a longer period of time, and thus the contents of their writings were greater or more voluminous than that of the “minor” prophets. The case is that the so-called “minor prophets” spoke and wrote over a shorter period of time. Some of those prophets had only one message which they had received from Jehovah: like Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. A point to be emphasized is that a message from Jehovah was just as important when revealed by a “minor” prophet, as when revealed by a “major” prophet.

As a device for stimulating interest in the messages of the minor prophets, some reviews are presented by way of the “low road,” and others by way of the “high road.”

Admittedly, a thorough, in-depth treatment of the “minor” prophets cannot be given within the limitations of the present assignment.

At the outset, a study of the prophets, whether minor or major, calls for a definition of a prophet. Liberals, such as the late A. B. Davidson, affirmed that a prophet is always a man of his own time; that he is always a forthteller and never a foreteller; and that, therefore, there is no such thing as predictive prophecy. Converse to Davidson [et al.], Moses wrote: “Jehovah said unto me...I will raise them up a prophet...like unto me, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deut. 18:17-18). In this reference, Moses set forth the position, the mission, and the function of a prophet. A prophet was a spokesman for God. He was charged with the obligation of proclaiming to mortal men the message which God put into his mouth. The only limitation placed upon a prophet was his obligation to speak only the words that were given him—whether the words were of commendation, or condemnation, or information, or of Divine predictions. Further, at the outset of a study of the prophets, attention must be given to the chronological order of the prophets relative to the approximate time each prophet wrote, the state of affairs in both the nation of Judah and the nation of Israel, together with an identification of the surrounding nations, their power and force. Without such basic information, the prophets can have, as a general rule, no understandable messages.

Joel, The Pest Exterminator Preacher (ca. 796 B.C.)

To take the low road on Joel, he may be designated as being a pest exterminator preacher. The nation of Judah had been invaded by hordes of locusts blown in by angry

winds. The crops had been eaten up. The fig trees, as well as other trees, had been barked! Even the meal offering and drink offering had been cut off from the house of Jehovah. The priests were in mourning.

When did Joel write? The liberals say “late”: that to date Joel properly one must find a time in Judah’s history when there was no king, when there was no idolatry, when there was no temple, and when there were no walls about the city. Thus the liberals date Joel after the captivity and the return.

Now the case for an early date for Joel is reflected in the following:

1. The temple was standing, for Joel urged, “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly...unto the house of Jehovah your God” (Joel 1:14).

2. The walls of the city were intact, for Joel observed relative to the locusts, “They leap upon the city; they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses like a thief” (2:9).

3. There was no idolatry among the people, for Joel exhorted:

Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning [in short, all the regularities of worship, RT, author’s comments bracketed throughout],...and rend your hearts and not your garments [their hearts were not in their worship] (2:12-13).

4. There was a bona fide king in Judah, but he was a child, and he, too, was called to the assembly, for Joel urged, “Assemble the old men, and the children” (2:16). King Ahaziah had been slain, and Queen Athaliah arose and destroyed all the seed royal. At least she thought she had destroyed all, but king Ahaziah had fathered a child (Joash), and Jehosheba, a sister of the late Ahaziah and the wife of the high priest, Jehoiada, knew of the child.

She stole him away and hid him in the house of Jehovah for six years. In the child's seventh year, he was presented as the king of Judah (2 Kings 11-12).

Joel had a ready-made formula for the extermination of the clouds of locusts—Jehovah's army—which had been driven in by the ill-fated winds. What was the formula? It was a twofold combination: "rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13). The formula worked: "Then was Jehovah jealous for his land, and had pity on his people" (2:18). Joel, in a state of ecstasy, blessed the land, the beasts of the field, and the children of Zion (2:21-23). In that state of ecstasy, he was moved to prophesy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the memorable Pentecost day. The Holy Spirit would be poured out

upon all flesh [that is, the Spirit would be poured out upon the Jew and Gentile]; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [the Spirit would be poured out without distinction of sex], your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions [the Spirit would be poured out without distinction of age], and upon the servants and the handmaidens in those days I will pour out my Spirit [that is, the Spirit would be poured out without distinction of social position] (2:28-29).

Joel closed his book with a view of how the nations shall be judged and spiritual Judah shall be delivered. "Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat," Joel said (3:12). In short, there will be a resurrection from the dead, and all evil men shall be punished.

Jonah, The Gourd Vine Preacher (ca. 794 B.C.)

Jonah had a great record as a preacher, or prophet. He had, in fact, been the source for the saving of his nation,

Israel. The book of 2 Kings records how that Jeroboam (II) “restored the border of Israel, according to the word of Jehovah...which he spake by his prophet Jonah” (14:23-27), but in time Jonah opted his loyalty to God for a mere gourd vine which grew up in a night and perished in a night—a gourd vine which Jonah did not plant, a gourd vine which he did not cultivate! How may one account for the about-face of that prophet Jonah?

To answer, during the ministry of Jonah, the border of Israel had come to embrace “the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah,” and Judah’s king, Uzziah, had “spread abroad even unto the entrance of Egypt” (2 Chron. 26:1-8). The two nations were at peace, and together their borders were greater than the borders of any other nation in that period of the small kingdoms. The power of Syria had been broken. There was only one viable threat on the horizon—Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh, a city that was more than six hundred miles removed from Israel.

Jonah was not only a great prophet, but he was a great patriot. He was, to use a figurative expression, “walking on air” as a result of Israel’s military position. Then came “the word of Jehovah...saying, arise and go to Nineveh, that great city and cry against it for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:1-2). Those Ninevites were the descendants of Ham, Cush, and Nimrod: “and Nimrod went...forth into Syria, and builded Nineveh” (Gen. 10:6-11).

Jonah dared to dispute with Jehovah. As the fourth chapter will show, Jonah contended with Jehovah and, in turn, fled by ship to Tarshish (Spain) from the presence of Jehovah. He seems to have rationalized that, if he fled from his home country, he would be free from the presence of and responsibility to Jehovah; but no mortal can escape the presence of Jehovah. Jonah had made a very emotional decision. There is no wonder then that he went into the

“innermost parts of the ship, and he lay and was fast asleep” (Jonah 1:5). In short, the sleep was the result of Jonah’s great emotional decision.

Jehovah sent out a great wind, and a storm arose. The mariners despaired of their lives. The shipmaster awoke Jonah and urged that he call upon his God. Jonah’s basic character bled through when he replied to the mariners’ interrogations, saying: “I am a Hebrew: and I fear Jehovah...Take me up, and cast me into the sea: so shall the sea be calm” (1:9, 12). But those mariners (Gentiles) rowed in an effort to save his life, for which Jonah gave them not a thought. Eventually, those mariners were compelled to throw Jonah overboard. A prepared fish swallowed Jonah, and three days and nights later that fish vomited out Jonah upon dry ground. Jonah made his way back to his own country.

Days intervened, and then:

the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying, arise, and go unto Nineveh and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh, an exceedingly great city, of three days’ journey. Jonah began to enter the city a day’s journey, and, as he entered, he cried,...yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown (3:1-4).

There was no pathos in his voice. Nonetheless, all the people of Nineveh believed God, and they proclaimed a fast. Even the king covered himself with sackcloth and ashes.

In the meantime, Jonah went out of the city to the east side. He made a booth and sat under it in the shade, “till he might see what would become of the city” (4:5) or till the forty days were up. He was waiting to see Nineveh destroyed! On the thirty-ninth day, God caused a gourd vine to come up in the night, and Jonah was exceedingly

glad because of that gourd vine, but in the following night the gourd vine withered. On that fortieth day, Jonah was so disappointed that his gourd vine had withered that “he requested for himself that he might die” (4:8). Jehovah asked, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” Jonah replied, “I do well even unto death” (4:9). Jehovah then asked, “Should not I have regard for Nineveh...wherein are more than six score thousand [120,000] persons that cannot discern their right hand from the left [in short, children three years of age and under]?” (4:11).

As the fourth chapter shows, when Jonah first received his call, he became exceedingly angry. He remonstrated against Jehovah. In substance, he said to Jehovah, “If I go and proclaim unto the Ninevites that in forty days their city shall be destroyed, then they will repent and thou will spare them.” Later, when Jonah had preached and the people had repented, he said to Jehovah:

Was not this my saying, when I was in my country? Therefore, I hasted to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and abundant in loving kindness, and repentest thee of evil [in short, that thou art gullible] (4:2).

Jonah, from his self-righteous position, was registering a basic character weakness against Jehovah, but what a great commendation that complaint really was! How self-righteous, covenant-advantaged, race-prejudiced can a preacher or prophet of God be? Every person can well afford to examine himself/herself. Jonah chose his gourd vine which he did not plant, nor did he cultivate, over 120,000 innocent children! What a pitiable, race-prejudiced man Jonah was!

Wait now! Who wrote the book of Jonah? Who would have had sufficient information to so write? The answer resounds: only Jonah had the information. Jonah wrote

the book. He had reconsidered the matters, and he had come to see what a self-righteous, covenant-advantaged man he was. He left himself in an ugly light and without offering a single excuse.

Amos, The Country Preacher (ca. 760 B.C.)

Amos was a country preacher. When Amaziah, the high priest of Bethel, was bringing a charge of conspiracy against him, Amos justified his preaching by saying to Amaziah:

I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son [that is, Amos had not attended one of the schools of the prophets nor had his father before him attended one of those schools]. I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees (Amos 7:14).

Amos proceeded to justify his preaching on the basis that "Jehovah took me from following the flock and said unto me, Go prophesy unto my people Israel" (7:15).

The high priest Amaziah had petitioned king Jeroboam to expel Amos from the land, and, when the king failed to do so, Amaziah took the task upon himself and said unto Amos:

O thou seer, go, flee into the land of Judah [Amos' home country], and there eat bread [or get your money for preaching], 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).

At that time, the nation of Israel was spiritually in a sad state of affairs, and God had dispatched Amos, of the nation of Judah, to call Israel to repentance.

Amos was not only a country preacher, but he was also an unadorned orator. He was a good sermonizer. The

first six chapters constitute, so to speak, a full-length sermon, which sermon falls into a logical order of introduction, body, and conclusion. He was very adept at parallelism and rhetorical devices.

Amos was a committed man—a spokesman for Jehovah. Further, he was a great communicator—a master at developing rapport with his audiences. He began with a point of unquestioned agreement. To illustrate, he began his sermon with a statement: “Thus saith Jehovah, for three transgressions of Damascus [Syria] yea for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof” (1:3). The response of the people was, no doubt, a hearty “Amen.” With his “for three transgressions, yea for four,” he moved to Philistia, to Tyre, to Phoenicia, to Edom, to Amon, and to Moab (1:6, 9, 11; 2:1). One can imagine the “Amen” responses as Amos spoke! Then Amos said, “Thus saith Jehovah: for three transgressions of Judah, yea for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof” (2:4). There were likely few, if any, “Amens” at this point, for those Israelites would naturally become apprehensive of what would come next.

Then Amos said, “Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof” (2:6). Amos proceeded to itemize Jehovah’s complaints against Israel, namely: (1) the rich sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; (2) they “panted after the dust...on the heads of the poor”; (3) they “turned aside the way of the meek”; (4) “a man and his father went into the same maiden”; (5) they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge; (6) they drank in the house of their god the wine of such as had been found (2:6-8).

Israel, at that point in time, was quite affluent. There were those who sat in Samaria in the corner of a couch

and on the silken cushions of a bed (3:12). They had their winter houses and their summer houses (3:15). There were women (“cows” Amos called them in 4:3) who crushed the needy and said to their husbands when they arrived at the end of the day, “Bring and let us drink” (4:1).

Amos was straightforward in his pronouncements of woes upon Israel, including: (1) Woe to “ye that put far away, the evil day”; (2) Woe to ye that “cause the seat of violence to come near”; (3) Woe to ye that “stretch yourselves upon your couches”; (4) Woe to ye that “eat the lambs out of the flock, and calves in the stall [stall-fed calves]” (6:1-4).

With his adeptness at rhetorical devices, Amos asked: (1) “Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?” (2) “Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?” (3) “Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is set?” (4) “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city and the people not be afraid?” (5) “Shall evil [punishment] befall a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?” (2:3-6).

Amos’ conclusion to his sermon was pertinent and to the point. His conclusion included the following: (1) “The lion hath roared: who will not fear?” (2) “The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy [teach, exhort]?” Jehovah shall “visit the altars of Bethel;” He will “smite the winter house with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish; and the great houses shall have an end” (2:8, 14-15).

Amos’ mission as a visiting preacher-prophet continued for an extended period of time. He uttered the classic prophecy of how “In that day will I [Jehovah] raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen” (9:11). James, the Lord’s half-brother, quoted Amos’ full prophecy and applied the fulfillment to the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 15:13-21).

Hosea, The Preacher Whose Wife Was A Swinger (ca. 756 B.C.)

When Hosea was young and single, he was called to preach at the rich, luxurious, and influential church at Bethel. Jeroboam was the great king at Bethel, and, though advanced in age, he still worshiped at the altar. The church at Bethel was known for its soft sell and broad-mindedness. The women, in keeping with the nature of women, were no doubt helpful in entertaining Hosea and in directing him in his courting a good young woman—a woman who would serve well as a preacher’s wife. Perhaps some of those mothers had an abiding desire to marry their daughters off to their young preacher. The days were, no doubt, busy ones for Hosea.

Imagine the chagrin of that society church when their new minister appeared with his new bride, whose name was Gomer: and imagine their surprise and concern when they learned that Hosea’s new bride, Gomer, was the daughter of Diblaim, likely a beautiful and well-known courtesan. Only when a woman was especially known for some unusual capacity or profession did her name appear in the Holy Writ. Some of those elders may have known Diblaim personally.

How may one account for Hosea’s whirlwind courtship? The case is that “Jehovah said unto Hosea, go take unto thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom; for the land doth commit great whoredom, in their parting from Jehovah” (Hos. 1:2). Why would a righteous God demand a thing like that? Well, Jehovah was married to Israel, an adulterous prostitute! Which should be the more shocking, or worse—for Hosea to be married to a prostitute, or for Jehovah to be married to one?

The point to be pressed is that Jehovah intended that the prophet Hosea should be a living object lesson to the

people of Israel. The fact is that Hosea's grief, occasioned by Gomer's infidelity, would reflect Jehovah's grief and suffering as occasioned by the infidelity of Israel. Further, Hosea's children were for signs in that spiritual decline of Israel. To illustrate, Gomer bore Hosea a son, and Jehovah said: "Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease" (1:4). Gomer then bore a daughter. Jehovah said: "Call her name Lo-ruhamah ["Lo"—not Hosea's daughter]: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel that I should in any wise pardon them" (1:6). When Gomer

had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. And Jehovah said, call his name Lo-ammi [Lo-ammi: "Lo," not: "ammi," people—thus another child not sired by Hosea]; for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God (1:8-9).

The birth of each child by Gomer represented a spiritual decline in the history of Israel. The son, Jezreel, represented the reign of king Jehu. While Jehu had destroyed all the sons of Baal out of Israel, he "departed not from...the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan" (2 Kings 10:29). The daughter, Lo-ruhamah, represented another spiritual decline in Israel. Captivity had threatened, and, at the birth of Lo-ruhamah, the captivity of Israel was certain. The birth of Lo-ammi represented a third spiritual decline in Israel. Not only would Israel go into captivity; but, unlike Judah, Israel would never be brought back, except as they as individuals and families chose to return under Ezra.

The second chapter opens with these words: "Contend with your mother, contend: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband" (Hos. 2:2). In short, Gomer had left the home and her children and was following after her paramours. Wayward Israel had previously set the course for Gomer.

Years passed and Gomer has been abandoned by her lovers. She is on a slave block, and Jehovah informs Hosea of the fact and instructs him: “Go again, love a woman beloved of her friend, and an adulteress, even as Jehovah loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins” (3:1). Hosea reported, “So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a half homer of barley”—the mere price of a female slave (3:2). Hosea continued: “Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be any man’s wife: so will I also be [no sexual relationship] toward thee” (3:3). The point of all of this was that the half-breeds of such a sinful relationship would abide many days without a king, or sacrifice, ephod, or teraphim; but, afterward, “the children of Israel shall return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king, and shall come with fear unto Jehovah and to his goodness in the latter days” (3:5).

When Jesus said to his disciples, “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest” (John 4:35), they saw Samaritans, half-breeds, in the poverty dress of white and led by “the woman at the well”—thus the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Hosea.

This prophet Hosea had a long ministry. He prophesied in the days of Uzziah (forty years), Jotham (sixteen years), Ahaz (sixteen years) and Hezekiah (two years). Uzziah’s reign in Judah was concurrent with Jeroboam’s reign in Israel. Hosea must have reached the age of ninety or beyond.

Micah, The Preacher For The Church Across The Railroad Tracks (ca. 719 B.C.)

The prophet Micah was concurrent with the great prophet Isaiah. To illustrate, Isaiah 1:1 reads, “The vision of Isaiah...which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah [the call came the year Uzziah died—

chapter 6], Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah,” whereas Micah 1:1 reads, “The word of Jehovah that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”

Isaiah was the preacher for the uptown church at Jerusalem, but Micah was the preacher for Moresheth-gath, a small church across the railroad tracks, some thirty or more miles from Jerusalem, which was once a location in ancient Philistia.

The church in Jerusalem was large. It boasted a beautiful building, the temple, and the king worshiped there; whereas, the church at Moresheth-gath was small, insignificant, and composed of numerous poor people. Isaiah was commissioned to preach to Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1). Micah was commissioned to preach to both Samaria and Jerusalem (Mic. 1:1).

Isaiah and Micah were both great and true preachers—prophets in fact. Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied of the future coming of Christ. Isaiah prophesied of the fact of the virgin birth: “Therefore the Lord will give you a sign: behold a virgin shall conceive [a thing humanly impossible] and bear a son [and that without the male seed], and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Micah prophesied of the place of the virgin birth. The child would be born in Bethlehem (an equally remarkable prophecy): “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, which art little among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel” (Mic. 5:2).

Micah pronounced some remarkable woes upon the ungodly: (1) “Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds [they laid their plans to take possessions in the night], and when it is light, they practice it”; (2) Woe to them that covet the fields of the poor, and

proceed to take them by illegal forces under the cover of the law: they even stripped the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war; (3) Woe to them that evict women and children (2:1-2, 9).

The degradation of Israel was brought about by the leaders of Israel. They were haters of good and lovers of evil. They repaid God's kindness with apostasy, blasphemy, and idolatry. They frequently used God's name, but they worshiped Him after their order. They sought to bargain with God. They were ready always to slay their choicest calves as sacrifice offerings.

Micah predicted the fall of Samaria (1:6-7), the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib (1:9-16), the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (3:12-7:13), the exile in Babylon (4:10), the return from captivity and the future peace and supremacy of Israel (4:1-8:13; 7:11, 14-17), and the birth of the Messianic King in Bethlehem (5:2).

Micah is quoted three times: by the elders of Israel (Jer. 26:18), by the chief priests and scribes informing Herod where Jesus would be born (Matt. 2:6), and by Jesus when sending out the twelve (10:35-36). Micah stressed three great principles of conduct, namely: (1) "to do justly"; (2) "to love kindness [mercy]"; (3) "to walk humbly with God" (Mic. 6:8).

Obadiah, The Preacher With A Message Of Doom For The Nation Of Edom (ca. 709 B.C.)

Obadiah had a message of doom for the nation of Edom—and, in this case, a complete annihilation of all the people: "There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it" (Obad. 19). Obadiah had received a message from Jehovah. An ambassador was being sent among the nations, saying, "Arise ye, and let us

rise up against her in battle...Thou art greatly despised” (vv. 1-2). Now, what God allows, God does. In short, God was displeased with Edom.

There had been a time when the city of Jerusalem was under siege, and the Edomites (that is, descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, the sons of Isaac)

stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his [Judah’s] substance and foreigners entered into his gates; and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou was one of them. But look not thou in the day of his distress [in short, another day of destruction would come upon the Jews at Jerusalem] and rejoice not over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction (vv. 11-12).

The point is that there was coming another day when Jerusalem would be destroyed. Thus, Obadiah warns that, if Edom does stand on the other side against Jerusalem, there will not be a single survivor of the Edomites in the next destruction of Jerusalem.

The scholars carry on a running debate as to the date for the book of Obadiah. Some scholars regard the book as being the very earliest of the books of the prophets, and thus earlier than Joel. Others date the book at the complete destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. If, however, 586 B.C. be the date, then there would be no other occasion for Edom to stand on the other side. They would have been standing on the other side.

Some date Obadiah on the occasion of the capture of Jerusalem by Shishak, king of Egypt, during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25; 2 Chron. 12:2). Others date the book during the reign of Jehoram when the Philistines invaded Judah (2 Chron. 21:16-17; 2 Kings 8:20). Still others date the book on the occasion when Jerusalem suffered at the hands of Joash, the king of Israel that defeated Amaziah (2 Kings 14:18; 2 Chron. 25:17).

The most likely date would be during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, who

walked in the way of the kings of Israel and made molten images for Baalim,...wherefore God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria;...and they carried a great multitude to Damascus (2 Chron 28:2, 5).

At that time did king Ahaz send unto the king of Syria to help him, for again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah and carried away captives (28:16-17).

A point to be emphasized is that Jehovah sent Obadiah to Edom to warn that nation of its sins and also of the possibility for its complete extinction. Edom was a very prideful nation. Obadiah wrote: "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?" (Obad. 3). Wherein did Edom's pride rest?

For one thing, Edom had great military powers (vv. 3-4). Her power lay in her lofty mountains, her high hills, her steep crags, her tropical heat, and her apparent scarcity of water. In short, those Edomites dwelt in the clefts of the rocks. They verily thought that no army could bring them down, and they thought that no army could survive on their scarcity of water.

For a second thing, Edom had great wealth (vv. 5-6). Beyond the border, Edom had great fertile fields, well-watered valleys, and great forests. Further, Edom was blessed with an abundance of two precious metals—iron and copper—and, as if that were not enough, Edom had a sea port, Ezion-Geber, with a smelting plant located on the gulf of the Aqaba which fed into the Red Sea.

For a third thing, though Edom was a small country of about thirty miles in width and some one hundred miles

in length, the great King's Highway ran the length of the territory. In short, commerce by way of the sea and by way of the King's Highway was one aspect of the "pride of Edom."

For a fourth thing, Edom prided itself on its wise men, its strong alliances with other nations, its political finesse, its statesmanship, and its mighty men of Teman (v. 9). The book of Job, written by Job himself, was of the nation of Edom.

Though the Edomites descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, he "pursued his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11).

Thus, Obadiah counseled Edom:

Look not thou on the day of thy brother in the day of his disaster; 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; neither lay ye hands on their substance in the day of their calamity (Obad. 12-13).

Another day of destruction would come upon Judah, and Edom is warned against further action against his brother.

The outcome of Obadiah's urging was negative. Edom kept up its perpetual hatred. Jerusalem fell to the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. The year was 586 B.C. Anyway, after the fall of Jerusalem and after many Jews had been deported to Babylon, a psalmist wrote: "Remember, O Jehovah, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem; who said Rase, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psm. 137:7).

Jeremiah wrote in one of his lamentations:

Rejoice and be glad O daughter of Edom that dwells in the land of Uz: The cup shall pass

through to thee also; thou shalt be drunken, and shall make thyself naked. The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion. He will no more carry thee away into captivity. He will visit thine iniquity. O daughter of Edom, he will uncover thy sins (Lam. 4:21-22).

In keeping with Obadiah's prophecy that, "there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau," the historical facts are:

1. The Edomites were expelled from their homeland by the Nabataeans (550-400 B.C.).

2. The Edomites that escaped then occupied Negeb, which was called Idumaea, and they harassed Judah. They temporarily occupied Hebron, until Judas Maccabaeus defeated them by slaying 20,000 in 185 B.C.

3. In 109 B.C., John Hyrcanus annexed Idumaea, compelled the males to be circumcised, and forced upon them the Law of Moses.

4. In 147 B.C., Herod the Great, an Edomite, was appointed king of the Jews by Julius Caesar. King Agrippa, who was part Jew and part Edomite, was the last Edomite on record (Acts 26). There are no Edomites today.

Nahum, Another Preacher With A Message of Doom—This Time For Assyria (ca. 640 B.C.)

Some 150 years before Nahum's commission to preach, Jonah had been dispatched to Nineveh to announce "Yet forty days and the city of Nineveh shall be destroyed" (Jonah 3:4), but the people of Nineveh repented, and the city was not destroyed. Now, some 150 years later, Nahum, a preacher of righteousness, is dispatched to Nineveh to announce the doom of that Assyrian nation. Judah was then under the Assyrian yoke and had been for some three decades or more. Why?

At that point in time, Manasseh was king in Judah. He had "seduced Judah...so that they did evil more than

the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Chron. 33:9). Thus, Judah had been subjected to Assyria’s exploitations. When Judah was faithful, Jehovah’s providence prevailed in the nation’s behalf, but, when the people worshiped the idols of the Assyrians, Jehovah withdrew His providence.

Nahum appeared on the scene of action to announce a burden of doom upon the nation of Assyria. His words were:

Jehovah hath given commandment concerning thee [Assyria], 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 (Nah. 1:14).

Nahum, however, was careful to report that “with an overrunning flood he will make a full end of her place, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.” Nahum continued: “he [Jehovah] will make a full end, affliction shall not rise up the second time.” When describing how that Jehovah would restore the excellency of Jacob, Nahum stated again: “The gates of the rivers [note “rivers”] are opened, and the place is dissolved” (Nah. 1:8-9; 2:6).

Now the liberals who decry the concept of Divine inspiration date the book of Nahum in the years 616-612 B.C. This they do so as to account for that which would otherwise be predictive prophecy. In short, the liberals would have Nahum present and observing the rising flood when he predicted that Assyria would be destroyed by an overflowing flood. In actuality the proper date for Nahum would necessarily be ca. 640 B.C.

Interestingly, in 616 B.C., Nabopolassar, a general under the Assyrian, king Sinsariskun, revolted and joined forces with the Medes under Cyaxares, together with the Scythians, in a large-scale attack against Nineveh, the capital city. Their attack against the walls of the city of Nineveh was a failure, but in 612 B.C. the “Nahum-

predicted flood” came by means of the Tigris and Khose rivers. The walls broke by the force of the flood, and the enemy armies rushed in for the kill.

Assyria was a powerful nation known for violence, falsehood, and plunder. The nation was characterized by ruthlessness and horrible cruelty. Ashurbanipal, by way of example, boasted of his violence and atrocities, which included tearing off the limbs of his victims, putting out his victims’ eyes, impaling his victims, boiling his victims in tar, and skinning his victims alive. The nation prided itself on the great number of corpses, and its pyramids of human heads.

There are numerous high points in the book of Nahum. The following should be especially pressed, namely: (1) the goodness and severity of God (1:1-7); (2) the goodness and mercy of God toward the righteous (1:3, 7); (3) the power of the Divine wrath as witnessed in the nations (3:5).

Some principles in the book which beg to be emphasized include the following:

1. The principle of the retribution of Divine providence.
2. The principle of true greatness, which includes nations as well as individuals.
3. The principle of the utter vanity of all earthly glory.
4. The principle of God’s “being slow to anger,” predicated on His great and abundant power.
5. The principle of how that a wicked man can have no greater tormentor than another wicked man.
6. The principle of how that God “maketh the wrath of man to praise him” (Psm. 76:10).

Zephaniah, The Preacher Who Held Several Degrees—Pedigrees, That Is (ca. 628 B.C.)

The present day society is a degree-conscious society. When filing applications for many different kinds of

positions, the applicant is asked to list the degrees that he holds. Gospel preachers, when mailing their resumes to churches, invariably list the degrees that they hold, both the earned and the bestowed. While degrees are not everything, they do count for something—often for much, as a matter of fact. The late, inimitable Foy E. Wallace, Jr., used to say that, as a general rule, he had ninety-eight degrees.

The preacher Zephaniah formally listed all five of his degrees—pedigrees, that is. Not all the preachers (prophets) of the Old Testament held degrees, or pedigrees. Amos, the country preacher, was not of the seed royal and, therefore, had no pedigree, nor did Obadiah, nor did Habakkuk, nor Haggai, nor Micah, nor Nahum. The point to be stressed is that some of the prophets were of royal descent—that is, direct descendants of David who traced their lineage accordingly. Others traced their lineage from their father or tribe. To illustrate, Isaiah traced his lineage from his father Amoz; Jeremiah from his father Hilkiah; Ezekiel from Buzi of the priestly tribe; Joel from his father Pethuel; Hosea from Beer; Zechariah from Berechiah to Iddo. Daniel stated that he was of the “seed royal.”

Now, Zephaniah traced his pedigree as follows: “The word came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amarah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah” (Zeph. 1:1, ASV). What a “seed royal” lineage! Was Zephaniah a braggart, or was he a humble servant who was inferring a work for which he did not desire to take any credit? The latter was the case, for he was of the royal lineage, and his position in the prophetic office included the reign of Josiah.

A matter to be pressed is that Josiah was the greatest and best king that ever ruled on David’s throne. The king’s record reads:

And like unto him was there no king before him that turned to Jehovah with all his heart and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses: neither after him arose there any like unto him (2 Kings 23:25).

Now, this Josiah was the son of the wicked king Amon, who reigned over the nation of Judah for two years. Further, he was the grandson of the wicked king Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years and “shed innocent blood very much till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin in doing that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah” (21:16). Further, this Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight.

Now, some pertinent questions are in order. How may one account for the teaching and training of that mere lad? His mother? Who saw to the matter of his successful succession to the throne?

Josiah’s “mother’s name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath” (22:1). In the eighteenth year of Josiah (that is, after a reign of ten years), Shaphan, the scribe found a copy of “the book of the law” (22:8). It was delivered to the high priest Hilkiyah, who read the law to Josiah. There and then a great restoration got underway. Josiah’s mother may very well have made great contributions to his background. The Bible just does not say, but one thing that seems to be necessarily implied by the prophet Zephaniah’s pedigrees is that he was close to and served the needs of that eight-year-old king.

That Zephaniah was already serving as a prophet even when Josiah was born is also necessarily implied from his warnings concerning the king’s evil sons. Further, who was in a better position to supervise an eight-year-old king than Zephaniah?

The book of Zephaniah has a definite focal point, namely, “the day of Jehovah,” which always implied

punishment. The Baal worship prevailed. Further, Zephaniah specifically warned:

And it shall come to pass in the day of Jehovah's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's sons [whether sons of Manasseh and/or sons of Amon], and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel (Zeph. 1:8).

There were those who said, in effect, "let the day of Jehovah come, for Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil" (1:12). Zephaniah thus described the day of Jehovah. He said, "The day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm" (1:15-16).

In light of these matters, what greater and better counselor could an eight-year-old king have than the prophet Zephaniah? Without taking any credit for the great king Josiah, he implied his position and influence by listing his pedigrees—five of them.

Habakkuk, The Impatient, Self-Righteous Preacher Who Dared To Remonstrate With God (ca. 608 B.C.)

Habakkuk was an impatient, self-righteous preacher who dared to remonstrate with God! To "remonstrate" is "to plead in protest," to reprove, to present a grievance against another, and in this case against God. This Habakkuk dared to do. He filed a formal complaint against God as follows: "O Jehovah," he said, "how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear?" Then Habakkuk charged, "I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (Hab. 1:2). Then he proceeded to ask, "Why dost thou show me iniquity [that is, allow me to see] and look upon perverseness?" (1:3). Then Habakkuk concluded:

Therefore [that is, because God had so allowed] the law is slacked, and justice doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore justice goeth forth perverted. (1:4).

Those were charges made by Habakkuk, a mere mortal man, against an all-powerful, immortal God; further, the charges were made by a strict, dignified preacher, and he was the only one standing for righteousness, and with no support from Jehovah, he charged. What was the background for Habakkuk's controversy with Jehovah? Well, in past time (ca. 640 B.C.), Nahum had appeared with an announcement of doom for the nation of Assyria, the nation that had dealt so criminally harshly against Judah. The announcement was an occasion of delight to all Judah, including Habakkuk.

Nahum had assured Judah that "with an overrunning flood he will make a full end of her [the Assyrians'] place, and will pursue his enemies into darkness" (Nah. 1:8). As a further assurance, the prophet Nahum had said, speaking for Jehovah: "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. And now will I brake his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder" (1:12-13). Assyria, though, was still powerful. Her time had not come.

The case was that the people of Judah had been lulled into a false sense of security by the time of Habakkuk's protest. Those Jews cast aside any loyalty which they had for God, and they went about their worldly and sinful devices. The law was slacked, and the rank and file "were living it up," but Nahum was very unhappy. He was preaching against the sins of those relaxed people, and he was getting no help from Jehovah, he thought! Here lies the background of Habakkuk's remonstrations, for he was preaching against the people's sins, and Jehovah was

giving him no moral support. In substance, Habakkuk was bringing accusations against Jehovah.

Then Jehovah replied to this strict preacher, “Behold ye among the nations” (Hab. 1:5)—in short, look to the history of the nations for the punishment of the iniquities about which Habakkuk was complaining. The point is that Jehovah would use a heathen nation as an instrument to punish and chastise the sinners in Judah. Then Jehovah announced: “I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe...For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation” (1:5-6). In substance, Jehovah said to Habakkuk, I am in the process of raising up the Chaldeans (Babylon) to punish my people.

Habakkuk was startled, but he continued to remonstrate with Jehovah. He asked: “Art not thou from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God, my Holy One?” (1:12). The question implied a charge against Jehovah’s integrity. Asserting that “We shall not die,” he then said:

O Jehovah, thou hast ordained him for judgment
[that is, the nation of Judah] and thou O rock
[here Habakkuk describes Jehovah as a rock,
but with the intent to show that He was unjust]
hast established him for correction (1:12).

Then in a further effort to put Jehovah on the defensive, he said:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold [or
condone] evil and canst not look upon them that
deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when
the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more
righteous [Judah, he considered to be] than he?
(1:13).

In short, Habakkuk was asking Jehovah how He, being so righteous, could cause Judah to be swallowed up by such a wicked nation as the Chaldeans.

Then Habakkuk resolved, “I will stand upon my watch and set me upon my tower, and will look forth to see what he [Jehovah] will speak with me” (2:1). Then Jehovah answered, “Behold, his soul [that is, Babylon and the Chaldeans]...is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith” (2:4). This was Jehovah’s answer to Habakkuk’s seemingly unanswerable question. The “just shall live by faith” was the system of righteousness then, and it is the system today.

Jehovah God proceeded to pronounce woes upon Chaldea: “Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his” (2:6—ambition); “Woe to him that getteth an evil gain for his house” (2:9—covetousness); “Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establish a city of iniquity” (2:12—violence); “Woe to him that giveth his neighbor drink...that thou mayest look on their nakedness” (2:15—insolence); “Woe unto him that saith to the wood awake; to the dumb stone, arise” (2:19—idolatry).

Haggai, An Old Preacher Whose Sermon Topic Was “Bags With Holes” (ca. 520 B.C.)

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia ...Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made proclamation ...saying...Jehovah...hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all his people...let him go up to Jerusalem...and build the house of Jehovah (Ezra 1:1-3).

Some fewer than fifty thousand chose to go to Jerusalem. The company was led by Sheshbazzar/ Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar was his court name and Zerubbabel was his family name—Ezra 1:11; 2:2), and when, in the seventh month, they were settled in their cities, they “builded the altar of the God of Israel...and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto Jehovah” (3:2).

In the second year of their return, “the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Jehovah” (3:10): “But many of the priests and Levites...the old men that had seen the first house, when the foundation was laid,...wept with a loud voice; and many shouted for joy” (3:12).

Now Haggai, their preacher or prophet, was among the number that wept. In fact, he asked, “Who is there 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?” (Hag. 2:3). In short, Israel’s preacher was an old man, but, when he preached his sermon on “Bags with Holes,” he was still older—in fact, ten or more years older. He must have been ninety or more in age, for some twelve years had intervened since the foundation for the temple had been laid.

The cessation of the work on the temple was brought about by certain adversaries who said to Zerubbabel: “Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and we sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon who brought us up hither” (Ezra 4:2). But those pretended worshipers were syncretists—that is:

They [those whom the king of Assyria had settled in Samaria] feared Jehovah, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away (2 Kings 17:33).

Anyway, Zerubbabel and Jeshua said, “Ye have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our God” (Ezra 4:3). The enemies appealed to Ahasuerus (Cambyses, son of Cyrus, seven years) and later to Artaxerxes (Pseudo-Smerdis, ten months). The work on the temple was stopped.

Soon the prevailing spirit for the temple of Jehovah waned, and the people busied themselves with their own personal affairs. They built for themselves houses and

ceiled them, probably from the timbers contributed by Cyrus for the construction of the temple. Their overwhelming concern was for food, clothing, and shelter. Zerubbabel and Jeshua—the civil and ecclesiastical rulers—seem to have capitulated to the spirit of the time, along with the people.

Under those prevailing circumstances, the aged Haggai came forth as a spokesman for Jehovah. His subject was “Bags with Holes.” He charged: “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; Ye eat, but ye have not enough; Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; Ye clothe you, but there is none warm” (Hag. 1:6) And then Haggai stated the “why” of their unfortunate state of affairs. They were putting their wages into “bags with holes.” What a stupid thing for anyone to do! All along someone would observe that Jehovah’s house should be built, and the rank and file responded: “It is not time for Jehovah’s house to be built.” And in time their response had been shortened so that they merely replied with the proverb: “It is not the time for us to come” (1:2).

While Jehovah’s house was in ruins, the covenant of Jehovah was in a state of suspension. Haggai emphasized, “For your sake [for their own spiritual welfare] the heavens withhold the dew, and the earth withholdeth its fruit” (1:10). Then Haggai urged, “Go up to the mountain and bring down wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah” (1:8). Now, the case is that, except for king Darius, who provided for the materials and also underwrote the other costs of that temple, it could not have been built! The point to be pressed is that, except for the fact that those Jews did go to the mountain and bring down wood, there would have been no temple built, though it was built essentially by resources from king Darius.

Zechariah, The Young Preacher Who Saw Visions—Eight In Number (ca. 520 B.C.)

Haggai was perhaps ninety years of age when he was delivering his sermon on the subject entitled “Bags with Holes,” and the spirit of all the remnant people “came and did work on the house of Jehovah of hosts” (Hag. 1:14). The last record of Haggai is when he was given a message for Zerubbabel. The presumption is that thereafter he had died, but, in the meantime:

upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month...in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet (Zech. 1:7).

Thus Zechariah, a young man, entered upon a great career as a spokesman for Jehovah. As a prophet and preacher, Zechariah received eight visions. Each vision was quite significant, but no vision was more highly significant than the eighth vision, when Zechariah was instructed to say, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch” (6:12).

The eighth vision that Zechariah received was followed by a coronation scene in which Joshua, the high priest, was caused to wear two crowns. Crowns were to be made from the silver and gold which had been brought from the brethren of the captivity. The silver and gold were to be made into crowns, and those crowns were to be placed upon the head of Joshua, the high priest.

The meaning was that Joshua, with the two crowns, was a type of Christ, Who would be both king and priest. The explanation as given to Zechariah was that the Branch

shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah; even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit on his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace

shall be between them both...and they that are far off [the Gentiles, RT] shall come and build in the temple...of Jehovah (6:12-13).

An itemization of this vision will include the following:

1. The Branch Who would build the temple of Jehovah was/is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. The temple was/is the church. There was only one temple. That temple is the church.
3. Those who were afar off were the Gentiles. Those Gentiles would come and build in the church.
4. The Branch would occupy two positions—that is, He would be both King and Priest.

This prophecy from Zechariah strikes a death blow to the doctrine of premillennialism. For Christ would sit on His throne, He would rule on His throne, and He would be a priest on His throne. In short, Christ is now on the only throne on which He will ever sit.

The Hebrews writer states unequivocally that Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; and therefore, the lessons to be learned emphasize:

1. That Christ is Priest now;
2. That He is sitting on His throne now;
3. That He is ruling on His throne now;
4. That, therefore, Christ is both King and Priest now (Heb. 6; 7:1-3);
5. These facts sound the death knell to the doctrine of premillennialism.

Lessons to be learned from the study of Zechariah include the following:

One lesson to be learned from the visions of Zechariah is the fact of the ministry of angels.

Another lesson to be learned from the visions of Zechariah is the obligation that rests upon special leaders, such as Zerubbabel and Joshua, to lead their people in the paths that God would have them go.

A third lesson to be learned from the visions of Zechariah is that God, at all times, is in complete control of the universe.

A fourth lesson to be learned from the visions of Zechariah is that God's protecting providence is ever over His humble, obedient disciples.

A fifth lesson to be learned from the visions of Zechariah is God's provisions for the free moral agency of man.

Malachi, The Didactic-Dialectic Preacher (ca. 450 B.C.)

Malachi was a didactic-dialectic preacher. The didactic-dialectic method consists of (1) a charge or assertion; (2) an anticipated objection; and (3) the refutation of the objection. To illustrate, on nine different occasions, Malachi anticipated the response to his charge with the assertion, "Yet ye say." To illustrate:

(1) Malachi, speaking for Jehovah, said, "I have loved you, saith Jehovah, Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Then Malachi emphasized the love of Jehovah by pointing out the superiority of Jacob over Esau as an example of Jehovah's love (Mal. 1:1-4).

(2) Malachi, speaking again for Jehovah, said, "O priests, that despise my name." And then, in anticipation, he said, "And ye say wherein have we despised thy name." Then Malachi responded by charging: "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar" (1:6-8).

(3) Malachi, speaking for Jehovah, said: "My name [Jehovah's] shall be great among the Gentiles, but ye say, The table of Jehovah is polluted...even its food is contemptible." Then Malachi moved to charge further, "Ye say also, Behold what weariness; and ye have snuffed at it." Malachi then responded by declaring, "cursed be the man...who sacrificeth unto the Lord a blemished thing" (1:12-14).

(4) Malachi files charges of how that certain Jews had abandoned their wives to marry foreign women, “but ye say, Wherefore [in short, what of it?!” Malachi then moved to say, speaking for Jehovah, “I hate putting away...take heed that ye deal not treacherously” (2:13-16).

(5) Malachi further charged: “Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words [of rebellion]. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him?” Then Malachi answered, “In that ye say, Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them, or where is the God of justice?” Then Malachi proceeded to announce the coming of Jehovah’s messenger, and he asked, “Who can abide his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?” (2:17).

(6) Malachi, on another occasion, speaking for Jehovah, said: “Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts, But ye say, Wherein shall we return?” Then Malachi asked: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee?” Then Malachi replied, “in tithes and offerings.” Malachi further asserted, “Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation” (3:7-9).

(7) On another occasion, Malachi charged: “Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah, Yet ye say, What have we spoken against thee [they were so humble]?” They further asked, “What profit is it that we have kept his charge, and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts?” Malachi responded with emphasis: “Behold, the day [of Jehovah] cometh, it burneth as a furnace” (3:13-14; 4:1). Such was the attitude of those self-righteous well-doers.

The book of Malachi very naturally falls into six divisions:

1. profanity in Divine service (ch. 1);
2. priestly unfaithfulness (2:1-9);

3. ungodly marriages (2:10-16);
4. a day of judgment and purification (2:17; 3:1-6);
5. obedience brings prosperity (3:7-12);
6. the rise of the righteous one—Elijah, the prophet (ch. 4).

Some observations should include the following:

1. Ritual is an important element in religion, but it is not an end in itself.

2. Tithes and offerings are necessary, but they are so only as the expression of a sincere, moral, and deeply spiritual life.

3. A cheap religion avails nothing, and sacrifices that are given grudgingly are displeasing to God.

4. Better it is that a temple be closed than for it to be filled with half-hearted worshipers.

5. Divorce and intermarriage with the evil and unbelieving thwarts the purpose of God.

6. There is an eternal discipline in every requirement of God, whether ritual, offering, prayer, study, teaching, or assistance in behalf of others.

Finally, Malachi spoke of the future of the Gentiles as follows: “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my [Jehovah’s] name shall be great among the Gentiles” (1:11). How true the statement is today in contrast to Jehovah’s name among the Jews.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction To The Book Of Hosea

Rex A. Turner

Background

THE PROPHET HOSEA BELONGED to the northern kingdom. He represented the period of his ministry by the reigns of certain kings of the southern kingdom, namely Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. His ministry was also during the reign of Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom. The prophet Hosea was concurrent with both Isaiah and Micah. He was the son of Beerī, but nothing is known of Beerī. There is no information as to where he was born or buried. He necessarily lived to a ripe and old age. An acceptable date for the book of Hosea would be ca. 756 B.C.

The name “Hosea” means “salvation.” Homer Hailey has written:

The prophet’s name indicates “salvation,” “deliverance,” or “help.” Hosea (salvation) was the name of Israel’s great military leader and successor to Moses before his name was changed to Joshua (salvation is of Jehovah) (Num. 13:8, 16).

A chief characteristic of the book is that Hosea felt too deeply to express himself calmly.

At the time of Hosea, prosperity prevailed in both the northern and southern kingdoms. Jeroboam II had

“restored the borders of Israel from the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Jehovah, the God of Israel, which he spake by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet of Gath-hepher” (2 Kings 14:25), whereas Uzziah’s reign had been marked by successful wars, building projects, and increased fortifications (2 Chron. 26).

The State Of The Northern Kingdom

Two systems of religious worship prevailed in Israel, and each was a reproach against God—namely, the calf worship and the Baal worship. Jeroboam I had introduced the calf worship. “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods O Israel,” he said (1 Kings 12:28), and he placed a calf of gold in Bethel and another in Dan. Thus, he changed the object of worship, the place of worship, the time of worship, and the access to worship. Jeroboam’s son, Jeroboam II, had continued that order of worship. The Baal worship had been introduced and stressed since the time of Ahab and Jezebel (ch. 18).

Immorality prevailed in Israel: “There is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land”—**there was nought but swearing, breaking faith, killing, stealing, and committing adultery, with blood touching blood** (Hos. 4:1-4).

A reflection on the spiritual state of affairs in Israel is pertinent for the church today. Many of the factors which brought about the complete fall of Israel tend to be characteristic of the church today. To illustrate, God said through His prophet Hosea as follows:

1. My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee (4:6).
2. The pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in their iniquity (5:5).

3. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?...for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew that goeth early away (6:6).
4. Ephraim, he mixeth himself among the peoples: Ephraim is a cake not turned (7:8).
5. Ephraim is like a silly dove, without understanding: they call unto Egypt, they go to Assyria (7:11).
6. He hath cast off thy calf, O Samaria; mine anger is against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? (8:5).
7. I wrote for him [Ephraim] the ten thousand things of my law; but they are accounted as a strange thing (8:12).
8. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity: ye have eaten the fruit of lies; for thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men (10:13).
9. When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died (13:1).
10. 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 the transgressors shall fall therein (14:9).

Hosea Versus Amos

The scholars often draw a contrast between the prophet Amos and the prophet Hosea. Amos was a prophet of an earlier time than Hosea, and he was sent to prophesy to Israel. He had not attended a school of the prophets, but he showed himself to be a great orator. The scholars identify a great contrast between the spirit expressed by Amos and that of Hosea. Amos was forthright in his presentations. He proclaimed God's message in a forthright manner—God was (is) a God of righteousness and justice. In contrast, Hosea's message was characterized by a spirit of sympathy and understanding of the weakness of men. His message was (is) characterized by love and sympathy. He, like Amos, predicted the destruction of Israel, but he

looked beyond to a brighter day, when Israel would be as the sands of the seashore. His experience with Gomer is an object lesson of God's forgiveness.

Hosea—The Man

Hosea was instructed by Jehovah to marry a woman of "whoredom"—not a whore as such, but a daughter from the environment of whoredom. Hosea took Gomer to wife—a virgin, but the daughter of a whore whose name was Diblaim. An account of the circumstances which came to prevail show that Hosea was very much in love with his young wife. Then those circumstances changed. Gomer followed in the path her mother had trod. She bore two illegitimate children—a son and a daughter. Then she left the household for her lovers.

There is no great wonder then of how that Hosea came to understand God's trying relationship with Israel. He was by experience able to understand how that God could still love Israel after all of Israel's whoredoms.

CHAPTER 3

Commentary On The Book Of Hosea

Garland Elkins

Chapter One

The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people,

and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel (Hos. 1).

THE STUDY OF THE “minor prophets” is a great study, and a detailed study of the book of Hosea is especially valuable. I hasten to point out that the “minor prophets” and their writings are not minor in the sense of being unimportant, but they are referred to as “minor” only because of the brevity of their writings. I emphasize emphatically that they are referred to as “minor prophets” not because their work was of lesser importance. Hosea’s book of fourteen chapters is much shorter than Isaiah’s sixty-six chapters. The book of Hosea falls into three different sections or divisions: Hosea’s preparation (chps. 1-3), Hosea’s message (chps. 4-13), and God’s call to repentance (ch. 14).

The northern kingdom of Israel (sometimes referred to as Ephraim) had its beginning because of Solomon’s sins, Jeroboam’s ambition, and the foolishness of Rehoboam. God told Solomon that, because of his sin, he would take the kingdom from him and give it to his servant (1 Kings 11:11). However, He promised to allow his son to rule over one tribe (11:13). Though God rent most of the kingdom away from Solomon’s son and gave it to Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Jeroboam proved unworthy by setting up an idolatrous worship (12:26-33).

God commanded Hosea to take a “wife of whoredom and children of whoredom.” I do not believe that Gomer

was actually at that time a harlot, but she came from a very questionable background, environment, and ancestry. God, through Hosea, showed His relationship with His people, “for the land hath committed whoredom, departing from the Lord” (Hos. 1:2).

Evidently Gomer’s “whoredom,” which word is mentioned sixteen times in the book, did not begin immediately, for “she conceived, and bare him a son” (1:3). Later she “bare a daughter” (1:6). The third child was a “son” (1:8), evidently not Hosea’s. God instructed Hosea to name the first son Jezreel. Jehu had done some good things but, like Jeroboam, had encouraged idolatry. As Jehu’s house would be destroyed (2 Kings 10:29-36), the record says of God He “will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel” (Hos. 1:4).

Concerning the daughter, God instructed Hosea to “call her name Lo-ruhamah,” which meant, “for I will have no more mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away” (1:6). They had become so corrupt that they had gone beyond the point of return. Judah, in the meantime, maintained temple worship and the rightful priesthood. They would be recipients of God’s mercy. Therefore, when Sennacherib’s Assyrian army besieged Jerusalem, God killed 185,000 of their soldiers (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). Unfortunately, at a later time, Judah went into Babylonian captivity because, like Israel, she committed spiritual adultery.

Then Gomer “conceived, and bare a son” (Hos. 1:8), whom God named “Lo-ammi,” which means “not my people” (1:8-9). They had rejected God for idols; therefore, God no longer considered them His people. Though Israel would cease to be God’s people, ultimately the promise made to Abraham would be fulfilled that “all the families of the earth would be blessed” in Abraham and his seed, which is Christ (Gen. 12:1-3; Rom. 4:10-25; 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:10; Gal.

3:16, 26-29). Representatives of the ten tribes returned with Zerubbabel and became a part of the southern kingdom, and ultimately their descendants, along with the Gentiles, became a part of spiritual Israel, the church (Rom. 2:28; Matt. 19:28; Gal. 6:15-16; Eph. 2:11-16). The Gentiles also would become His people (Rom. 9:25). The Jew and Gentile also would be brought together under the one head of the church (Eph. 1:10-11). The New Testament speaks emphatically, precisely, and clearly of this matter (Gal. 3:23-29; Eph. 2:11-22).

Chapter Two

Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me then now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her

nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God (Hos. 2).

In chapter two, Hosea urges the children to plead with their mother to abandon her lovers and to return home. God wanted the faithful remnant of the nation to plead with Israel to return to the true God and serve Him (2:1-2). Both Gomer and Israel had conducted themselves in an ungodly way, but God would expose them and show just how impoverished they really were (2:3-4). It is often the case that, though the innocent are not responsible for any infraction, yet they often suffer some of the consequences when the wicked are punished. Therefore, in verse four we learn that the children will suffer some pain. Gomer reasoned that other men could give her more (2:5). Likewise, Israel went after false gods, reasoning that they could do more for her than the true God. America has been blessed above all nations, but to whom do we give the credit—to God or to someone or something else? God would hedge up Gomer (2:6) so that she would no longer be with her lovers. As we learn in chapter three, He would send Israel into Assyrian captivity and Judah into Babylonian captivity 150 years later. Both the northern and southern kingdoms would learn not to worship idols. Like the prodigal son, Israel would hit rock bottom, repent, and cease from wickedness (Luke 15:11-24).

God taught Israel a lesson which got her attention by removing her material prosperity. Even the nations after whom she ran, instead of following after God, her true husband, would come to despise her when her full wickedness was uncovered (Hos. 2:10). She had maintained a mere form of outward signs and pretensions of worshiping God and surface merriment; the time would come when those would cease (2:11-12). Since she rejected and forgot God, He abandoned her to her folly and sin (2:13). The downward path of Israel is the same as that of the Gentiles described in Romans 1:18ff, indeed of any and all who forsake God. God loved Israel, and He would woo

her back to Himself. She would say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now" (2:7). God would chasten her for her benefit, but there was hope (2:14-15). The prophet looked to the time when Christ would come (Gal. 4:4-5; Heb. 2:9) and establish His church, and salvation would be in it (Eph. 5:23-33; Rom. 7:4). No more would they worship idols (Hos. 2:16-17). In that day the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled. The church, the house of God, His kingdom, would be established, and it would be a peaceable institution (Isa. 2:2-3; 11:1-16; Rom. 14:17), and Christ would protect them (Hos. 2:18). The church, the kingdom, was established on the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2. In that day, the Christian Dispensation, God would richly bless the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). The church would be married to Christ, her husband (Hos. 2:19; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:23). Likewise, the Gentiles would be called (2 Thess. 2:13-14) into the church, as well as the Jews (Hos. 2:21-23; Rom. 9:24-26). God's great mercy would be manifested in all of this (Eph. 3:10-11, 21).

Chapter Three

Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee. For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return,

and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days (Hos. 3).

In chapter three, Gomer is presented as a woman who has run after and had relations with other men, but now she is old and unattractive. In spite of all she has done, Hosea still loves her, though her former lovers regard her as almost worthless, ready for sale on the auction block. Likewise, though Israel had practiced spiritual prostitution with idolatry of the land, yet God still loved her.

After Gomer had lost her beauty and was unattractive, Hosea bought her back—at the lowest price paid for a common slave (Hos. 3:2), the equivalent of thirty pieces of silver (Exod. 21:32). However, for an extended period of time, she would neither be able to be with her foreign lovers, nor would conjugal relations take place between Hosea and Gomer (Hos. 3:3). Gomer would be tested to see if she would bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). In like manner, Israel was to abide for many years without blessing, until the coming of Christ, the Messiah. After Israel was carried into Assyrian captivity, Israel would have neither king nor things necessary for worship. She would have neither “ephod” (pure religion) nor “teraphim” (idolatry) (Hos. 3:4). In time to come, though, countless Israelites would seek out David (3:5). They had been opposed to David and the worship and service of the true God. For more than seven hundred years, they would be without prophet, priest, or king. Afterward, they would return to Christ the Messiah, the promised descendant of David, whose kingdom God would establish forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Acts 2:29-36). Their salvation would depend upon their obedience to Christ, the Messiah, as does the salvation of the entire world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4)!

Chapter Four

Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the Lord. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God. They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are

separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall.

Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The Lord liveth. For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye. The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices (Hos. 4).

Beginning with chapter four, the national guilt of Israel is exposed. Her sins are multitudinous, deep, and serious. Moral corruption is widespread.

Hosea's own wrecked home is a type of the unfaithfulness of the people to God and God's sorrow at their lack of fidelity. The first three verses of chapter four depict in language plain and unmistakable the pitiable spiritual condition of the nation. When God has a "controversy with the inhabitants of the land" (4:1), it is a serious matter indeed! The sins of which God accuses His people are serious and heinous sins, degrading both to individuals and to the nation. The sins that the prophet enumerates are some of the same sins which are so prevalent in our own beloved land of America. Both in word and deed they sinned, and, in doing so, they sinned against God and their fellow man, against God and the nation. In our day, the advocates of immorality, abortion, alcohol, drugs, homosexuality, false doctrine, rejection of the authority of God and His Word, the Bible, et al. are rampant.

The northern kingdom of Israel (and in many ways America, and the church in America, in our day) was rushing into inevitable destruction. All who love the world

make themselves enemies of God. James wrote, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). People become worldly and are destroyed for numerous reasons, but one of the most prevalent is the lack of knowledge of the Word of God (Hos. 4:6). The more God blessed Israel, and the more they increased, the more they sinned against Him (4:7-8). The worldly minded priest took the lead in causing the people to sin. The prophet said for God, “And they shall be, like people, like priest” (4:9). God points out that nothing they do could profit them or bring to them happiness and satisfaction (4:9-11). They had become hopelessly involved in idolatry (4:12-13). Their sin would cause them to fall (4:14). God pleads with Judah not to follow the wicked example of evil Israel (4:15). Israel had now gone so far that God abandons hope for them as a nation (4:16-19).

Chapter Five

Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor. And the revolvers are profound to make slaughter, though I have been a rebuker of them all. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled. They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord. And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them. They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously

against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions. Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be. The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water. Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment. Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him.

I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early (Hos. 5).

In this chapter God said of Ephraim and Israel, the northern kingdom, “O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled” (5:3). They were lifted up with pride (5:5); they had turned away from God and had gone after other things; therefore God said, “Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be” (5:9). Hosea wrote, “The princes of Judah were like them that removed the bound” (5:10). In other words, they removed the landmarks, and this the Lord forbids (Prov. 22:28; Deut. 19:14; 27:17). The Bible sets out landmarks, and these are not to be removed. Sadly, in our day, the landmarks which God has set out regarding both doctrine and morality are being rapidly removed by numerous people. To remove God’s landmarks and to follow a life of sin causes one inevitably to reap a terrible harvest (Hos. 5:14-15).

Unfortunately, “When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wounds” (5:13). The prophet stated in the long ago, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Solomon wrote, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

Chapter Six

Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me. Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood. And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness. I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled. Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people (Hos. 6).

The prophet predicts that the wrath of God will be so great that His people will eagerly seek His forgiveness,

and God is pictured as being willing to forgive (6:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). At the time of Hosea's writing, the goodness of both Israel and Judah was very temporary. The result was that God would destroy them as a nation (Hos. 6:5). Their facade of goodness, genuineness, and loyalty to God would be seen. God was more interested in mercy and the knowledge of God than He was in their sacrifices and burnt offerings: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (6:6). They had transgressed God's covenant and dealt treacherously against Him. They were workers of iniquity and polluted with blood. Even the priests had become guilty of murder and lewdness. God looked upon their evil conduct and said, "I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled" (6:10). He further warns Judah what will be in store for her at a later time: "Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people" (6:11).

Chapter Seven

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria: for they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without. And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face. They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened. In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the

night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me. Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this.

Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt (Hos. 7).

God had both the remedy and the desire to heal (forgive) Israel (7:1), but they would not turn from their sins (7:1-7). They even forgot that God knew of their sins (7:2). The nation of Israel had mixed themselves among the people and was like a cake not turned (7:8). The Lord intended for Israel to be separate from other nations (Lev. 20:22-26). However, Israel was like “a cake not turned” (Hos. 7:8). She was like a cake burned on one side but raw on the other. They tried to serve both God and idols, and that is an impossibility. God will not accept a divided allegiance (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; 6:24; 12:30). Israel had

lost her spiritual strength, and yet they were unaware of it (Hos. 7:9). She was like a silly dove, for, instead of returning to God, they depended upon Egypt and Assyria (7:10-11). For their actions God would chastise them (7:12). They had been redeemed by the Lord, and yet they fled from Him (7:13). Though God had been so good to them, they spoke lies against Him. Their repentance was not genuine, and, even though God had strengthened them, yet “they devise mischief against me” (7:14-15). They were “like a deceitful bow,” and their fall was certain (7:16).

Chapter Eight

Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law. Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings but not by me; they have made princes, and I knew it not, of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off.

Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off, mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it, therefore it is not God, but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk, the bud shall yield no meal, if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up, now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them, and they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes. Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin. I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the

sacrifices of mine offerings and eat it, but the Lord accepted them not; now will he remember their iniquity and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof (Hos. 8).

Punishment was coming upon Israel because they had transgressed the covenant of God and trespassed against His law. They had cast off the thing that was good, and for that reason the enemy would pursue Israel (8:1-3). They had sown the wind, and they would reap the whirlwind (8:4-7). Israel would be taken into Assyrian captivity (8:8-9). The nation had multiplied altars for sinning, and, since they were not immediately punished, they apparently thought they would go unpunished (5:11; Eccl. 8:11-13). One of the saddest statements in the book of Hosea is the following: "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing" (8:12).

Even though Israel had said, "we know thee" (8:2), it was a superficial knowledge. Like the Israelites who lived after the death of Joshua, and the elders that outlived him, they were a generation that had largely forgotten God (Judg. 2:10-15). They rejoiced in their prosperity, sought help from wrong sources, followed error, and they were lacking in sincerity: "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me" (Hos. 7:14). They went through the motions of worship to God, but it was only formality. This was not acceptable to God, and He would punish them (8:13-14).

Chapter Nine

Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a-whoring from thy God, thou

hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor. The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her. They shall not dwell in the Lord's land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria. They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the Lord. What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the Lord? For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them: the pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns shall be in their tabernacles. The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred. The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins. I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness: I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O Lord: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers. Ephraim is

smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations (Hos. 9).

Hosea charges Israel with unfaithfulness to God and laments the degree of their infidelity to God. This will result in their captivity (9:1-3). He predicts, "They shall not dwell in the Lord's land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria" (9:3). The day of punishment from God upon them is at hand (9:4-8). A good summary statement of that matter is in verse nine: "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins." God had found, wooed, and won Israel to be His spiritual wife, but His love was unrequited. Israel, while faithful to God, was as acceptable to Him as ripe grapes would be to a traveler in the desert. God sometimes referred to Israel as a vineyard or a vine (Isa. 5:1-7; Psm. 80:8; Jer. 2:21). In verses ten through fourteen, Ephraim is described as possessing many advantages and favors from the Lord, but through their disobedience they are about to suffer great punishment. Hosea wrote for God:

All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers, Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb (Hos. 9:15-16).

Their sin was about to find them out (Num. 32:23). They were about to reap what they had sowed (Gal. 6:7-8). Hosea concludes the chapter with, "My God will cast them

away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:17).

Chapter Ten

Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images. For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord; what then should a king do to us? They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel. As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water. The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them. It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows. And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye

have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of the mighty men. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children. So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off (Hos. 10).

God compares Israel to a vine in several passages (Psm. 80:8-12; Jer. 2:21). Though Israel had been abundantly blessed of God, yet they were not thankful nor gave thanks to God. They had the same attitude as the ungodly Gentiles which Paul described: “because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened” (Rom 1:21). They lavished gold upon their images, the work of their hands, and forgot God. What Jeremiah wrote applied largely to both Israel and Judah: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). The very gold of their altars served as a temptation to encourage their enemies to conquer them (Hos. 10:1). The reason for much of their sorrow was “their heart is divided” (10:2). One cannot serve God acceptably with a divided heart. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24), and “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” (12:30). The result was their words and deeds were evil, and Assyrian captivity awaited them (Hos. 10:2-8). Israel had followed a course of sin: “O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them” (10:9).

The reference to the sin at Gibeah referred to the terrible rape and murder of the Levite's wife (Judg. 19:13-30). As a result of their horrible sins, one tribe was almost destroyed. From the days of Gibeah, Israel had sinned, and now they were about to reap what they had been sowing through the years (Hos. 10:10). Israel was rejected of God because of her sins, but there was still hope for Judah (10:11). God's advice to Israel was, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (10:12). God's advice to Israel was, among other things, "break up your fallow ground." The Lord tells them that they should let the land that was slightly plowed be broken up again with a deep furrow (10:12). The day of reckoning for Israel was at hand, and the enemy would soon appear, capture, and punish Israel (10:13-15).

Chapter Eleven

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me,

my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the Lord: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints (Hos. 11).

The first verse of this chapter has both a primary fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. Jehovah called Israel His son, His firstborn son, which is the primary reference of the verse, and He also called Christ His Son, His true Son, which is the ultimate reference of the verse. The wayward course of Israel is set out by God (11:2-4). The Israelites departed from the Lord and sacrificed unto the Baalim and burned incense to graven images. The wicked queen Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal and Ashtaroath into Israel, and her husband, Ahab, king of Israel, built an altar and a large temple in the capital city of Samaria. God loved Ephraim (Israel). He had been mindful of him, cared for him as a parent, and yet Israel did not appreciate God's great favors and blessings.

Though Israel would not return to Egypt (although some individuals no doubt did, the nation as a whole would not), they would be taken into Assyrian captivity. In verse seven, we learn that Israel was bent on backsliding—on apostasy. How sad that it appears the same can be said about the church of our Lord today.

The loving heart of God ached for Ephraim (11:8). God did not desire to destroy Israel, but to save her (11:9-11;

2 Pet. 3:9). Israel at that time was wicked and hypocritical, “but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints” (Hos. 11:12).

Chapter Twelve

Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us; Even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast. I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets. Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields. And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved. Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him (Hos. 12).

Ephraim had fed on that which could not satisfy. He added sin to sin. They sometimes turned to Egypt and

sometimes turned to Assyria for help, but all such efforts were vain (12:1). Not only did the Lord have a controversy with the northern kingdom (4:13), but He also had a controversy with Judah and the southern kingdom (12:2). Jacob, their father, prevailed after he had wrestled with an angel (Gen. 32:28). Jacob found strength in God and prevailed, but his descendants merely claimed to follow God and did not do so as did Jacob. They gave lip service to their father Jacob and his faithfulness to God, but they did not walk in His ways. God urged Israel to turn to Him, and, if they would do so, He promised to bless the nation richly (Hos. 12:3-9).

God provided the nation of Israel with abundant instruction, yet to no avail as far as their applying what they were taught is concerned. He used every means and employed every method to instruct and save Israel, but sadly they would not listen to Him. Gilgal, which was beyond Jordan, had already been brought under subjection. Gilead, which was on this side of Jordan, was now as idolatrous as the other and would likewise fall (12:11). God through His providence had cared for Israel, but “Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him” (12:14).

Chapter Thirteen

When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves. Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.

Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me.

I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid. The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children. I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels. Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up (Hos. 13).

Humility always exalts men and nations (Matt. 18:1-3; Luke 18:9-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

There was a time when Ephraim was humble, but he became exalted with pride, followed idolatry, and died (Hos. 13:1). They continued to “sin more and more” (13:2). Their goodness was only temporary (13:3). God, through

Hosea, made clear that their condemnation was certain if they pursued their wicked ways. Judgment would come upon them suddenly, and with no promise of God's mercy (13:4-14). Israel had committed spiritual suicide: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (13:9). Although there might appear to be some hope that Israel would escape judgment, the Lord would see to it that the nation was punished. The die was cast: "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up" (13:16).

Chapter Fourteen

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein (Hos. 14).

Backsliding was characteristic of the Jews and of the race. From the time of Adam and Eve unto the present,

the history of mankind has been a record of backsliding, repentance, being forgiven, and then backsliding. When Jesus told Peter that he should forgive his brother seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22), we are impressed that this is an indication of great mercy. However, God's great mercy is so far greater, as He has forgiven sinful humanity. God is perfect in holiness, and therefore His very nature requires repentance, a turning from the sin which is to be forgiven. Sin corrupts and soils and works like a cancer. Paul wrote of some, "and their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus" (2 Tim. 2:17). Hosea 14:1-3 sets forth God's plea to Israel to return unto God, a statement of their guilt, and instruction on what to say and do that God might forgive them. It also involved a rejection of evil (14:3).

God says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (14:4). Note three things about this promise. (1) God would love them. (2) God would love them freely. God is not forced to love humanity; in fact, there is no quality in man which impels Him to love sinful man. (3) God's anger would be turned away from His people. God has a righteous indignation against sin (2 Kings 17:18): "All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers" (Hos. 9:15). Sin is indeed a terrible thing (Rom. 6:23).

The first three verses of this chapter, though written before the nation was taken into Assyrian captivity, were written just as it would have been after they went into captivity. In the thirteenth chapter, Hosea showed the destruction of the nation, and the nation as an entire nation was never restored, but individuals did return and become a part of the southern kingdom of Judah. Their words were

to be words of confession and contrition for their sins, words of praise and thanksgiving for the mercy of God. It is possible to be too poor to make offerings, but none are too poor to take words to God.

Proper words were of greater significance than were animal sacrifices. David said, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (Psm. 69:30-31). In the Christian Dispensation, the fruit of our lips is said to be a sacrifice of praise with which God is pleased (Heb. 13:15-16).

Verses five through eight depict the conditions of individuals who would accept the Lord's mercy. Dew sustained the small vegetation from day to day; likewise, we depend upon God's blessings upon a daily basis. We are to pray for our daily bread, not for a year's supply at once (Matt. 6:11). The lily is an emblem of purity and beauty. The cedars of Lebanon are sturdy, and that is the desired character for which all faithful of God strive. The olive tree is a tree of growth and beauty and fruitfulness. He further describes the penitent person and says, "and his smell as Lebanon" (Hos. 14:6). This suggests the beauty and fragrance of a life lived in obedience to God and in fellowship. The Jews understood the expression, "they that dwell under his shadow shall return" to refer to the Messiah. After penitence comes fruitfulness. In verses eight and nine, Hosea concluded the book by pointing out that Israel had, in prospect, stated a complete renunciation of idolatry. Captivity cured both Israel and Judah of their idolatry. They ceased to worship idols, but the whole of the Jews did not return to the pure worship of God. Hosea points out that God is "like a green fir tree" (14:8). God is an evergreen, a never-failing source of life to all who turn to Him. He concludes with, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know

them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein” (14:9). He makes clear that those who desire to know can learn and know. Jesus also taught this great truth (John 7:17). Only the babes, those who truly want to know, are promised that privilege (Matt. 11:25-27). Hosea closes this great book with “and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein” (Hos. 14:9).

CHAPTER 4

Great Lessons From The Book Of Hosea

Bill Jackson

Introduction

FAITHFUL SAINTS ARE DEEPLY indebted to the Southaven elders and to brethren Elkins and Warren, for the planning of this lectureship, begun in such a fine way last year, and producing such a valuable book for our use. This lectureship will grow in value and in influence, of course, and continue to give delight to brethren who love to be where Truth is honored. I now have a double honor: to speak concerning God's Word, but more, to speak concerning sermon material found in the portion assigned to me, the book of Hosea.

Permanent, Abiding Truths

As we, this week, study the Old Testament prophetic books and stress the truths that can be applied in our day and time from these books, we see such passages as Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11 combined into one voice, urging that we gain New Testament truths from Old Testament materials. Joining the verses together, we learn that Old Testament events, written and preserved for us, provide admonition, patience, and comfort as we thus study. By what is before us in way of example, and whether good or bad conduct is considered, I can learn how to behave

and how not to behave. In all of the Word, we find the permanent and abiding truths of God, and thus, in study, we learn and we grow.

Sermon Material Found In Hosea

The preacher pores over the Divine Volume in search of sermon material constantly, but more, he, even in personal study or in preparation for his classes, will still be alert for material to use in the future. Every Bible book is a mine, and he is permanently in the business of digging. And he will always be rewarded, and sometimes a portion of the Word becomes what the old gold-miners called “a glory hole!”—so full of riches that one can hardly gather it all. Hosea is thus filled, and we must be selective as to the points we make. We suggest these as sermon materials from Hosea.

God’s Love For His Own, Even When They Err

When that point is made, we dare not do as some do, in the religious world and in the kingdom, and that is to assume that, because God loves, He will tolerate and forgive even when correction is not made. Indeed, that is the point in Hosea: these in Israel turned from God, going into a spiritual adultery (committing great whoredom—Hos. 1:2), being guilty of the sin of backsliding (11:7), and having forgotten their Maker (8:14). Now, the very point made in the book is that punishment is coming! As is later mentioned in Hebrews 2:2, regarding the law, “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.” The birth of Hosea’s children occasioned their being named in descriptive fashion in lament of the nation being under condemnation from God (Hos. 1:3-9). Hosea’s wife, turning to harlotry, and then his taking steps to retrieve her from that manner of life, typified God’s people leaving Him, and then His love being such that He urges

their return to Him. The urging is that as they sought their pleasure elsewhere, they now give themselves to **seeking the Lord** (3:5)!

The Tragedy When God Has A Controversy With His People

Chapter four begins on the following note: “Hear the word of the Lord, for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.” There is then stated the lack of spiritual virtue among the people, seen as a lack of truth, mercy, and knowledge of God. There follows some details as to the types of misbehavior (4:2), combined with idolatry and corruption of the priesthood. On that last, it remains true that no people rise above the caliber of their leadership, and oh how true that is in our time when there is so much laxness and indifference on the part of many men who serve in elderships! In passing, let us note that the departures are summed up, finally, in the word **“pride”** (5:5; 7:10). Then and in our time, men cease to have that needed submission to and reliance upon God and begin to rely on their own devices, their own desires, and/or the devices of other men. Elevation of God ceases, and there is the elevation of **self: pride!** God and His people should form a great unity, and, when there is controversy with God, we may rest assured that men are at fault, not God!

The Basis For Destruction: Lack Of Knowledge

God states this in Hosea 4:6. It was not that the knowledge was not available, but that they had rejected it, and it is seen as a rejection of God! And indicated clearly here is the fruitage of such to be seen in their offspring! By God’s condemnation, uttered here, we are reminded of the Lord, speaking concerning the leadership of Judaism in his own time, when He said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God!” (Matt. 22:29). Nothing

today is any more of an indictment against us, before God, than the ignorance that abounds among the saints of God! The ease with which false teachers can approach the church of God, find a place among us, and work in such an arrogant and outward fashion, with hardly a protest raised, indicates a great lack of knowledge. And, hence, no spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:2)!

The Tendency To Forget The Nature Of God

It is summed up here by God's statement, "And they consider not in their hearts that I remember" (Hos. 7:2). The only hope that some would have in the Day of Judgment is that God forgets! But He does not forget, except in the case that corrective action is taken regarding one's sins (Heb. 8:12). The very nature of God is to the point that He sees, He knows, He remembers. The hold that sin can take on men, or on a nation, is seen in that they can embrace sin, continue in it, growing more non-spiritual day by day, and virtually forget that they're dealing with **God**! And God remembers! In any time of great departure from the faith—a time like our own—men tend to forget aspects of God's nature, and always to their own eternal ruin!

The Tendency To Seek Forbidden Fellowship

The points made in the New Testament on proper and improper fellowship have behind them the history of God's dealings with Israel and the fact that the very law He gave them forbade their fellowship with certain others! On that point, the Law was indeed a fact of enmity (Eph. 2:15) between Jew and Gentile. In so many instances of pain and hurt coming to the nation, the fault centered on their going beyond proper bounds God had placed on their fellowship. In Hosea 7:11, God notes their "call to Egypt" and their "going to Assyria." Thus, they turned to forbidden

fellowship, and not to the Lord (v. 14), not to the most High (v. 16). They sought covenant with the heathen (12:1). It indeed sounds like our own time, when such verses as Ephesians 5:11 are so readily ignored: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” We, now living, have never before seen such forces working in the kingdom, endeavoring to place us in full fellowship with those in the sectarian systems of our day. The “New Unity Movement,” combined with a developing “New Hermeneutic,” are designed to that end. Still, God limits our fellowship, as is plainly declared in 2 John 9-11.

The Danger Of Rejoicing In The Wrong Things

In Hosea 9:1, God warns Israel against her rejoicing, whether in newfound fellowship, or in forgetting about God, or in the “pleasures sin offers” (Heb. 11:25). They are still in rebellion against God, pictured here as having “gone a-whoring from thy God.” This reminds us of what is read in liberal journals of those who have left the Lord and the church and the “narrowness” of being confined to the Word, and they write on their “newness, liberty,” and delight in breaking away from the “hardliners.” Any man on earth can leave a point of Truth and “rejoice” in that which he finds, but he has still left the Truth! Some men rejoice in drink, or in drugs, or in a fornicating lifestyle, but these are still condemned. Men must do the Lord’s will always and rejoice in that!

The Reminder That Personal Responsibility Remains

Ezekiel 18:20 has been a classic verse making this point so plain. And here, in Hosea, near the end of the prophet’s message, and for all the ills that have been mentioned, and for all the influences others have been on

Israel, the point is still that “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!” (Hos. 13:9). Ultimately, due to man’s having freedom of will, his being saved or his being lost turns on his own responsibility and how he reacted to it. The same is true in regards to any nation, and it is seen in the prophet’s words to Israel. We must notice that, even at this point, God reminds that “in me is thine help.” Always that is so, when there has been the following of a sinful course; the answer, and the only right answer, is in God, and in God there is the help that is needed. God reminds these of old, “I will heal their backsliding” (14:4), and that healing would be accomplished as they turn from their iniquity (14:1). In God would be their only hope, and the point remains for us.

The Tendency To Forget We Are Dealing With God

We have noted that God had to remind them that He remembers. More than that, man often has the tendency to forget that God is not man—indeed, so much in the religious world (and sadly, in the church), that which is of error is justified by “I think” and “I feel,” with men taking unwarranted liberties with God and His will. In Hosea 11:9, we have this great reminder: “I am God and not man!” Always we must keep that in mind, lest we begin to look upon God as though He were a human being, and the next view is that of God’s Word being of no more significance than that of a man. Lost in all of this will be any tendency to view pleasing God as the prime consideration; man will elevate the pleasing of himself and place that upon the throne of his heart!

Conclusion

True of all studies of the prophets, and thus true of Hosea, is the fact that Old Testament truths involve a principle of God also found in the New Testament Law of

Christ. We thus have a volume wherein we can study an Old Testament event and see the principle involved in the New, and we can study the New Testament's teaching on righteousness and find ample illustrations of the same in the events and people of the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets thus speak to us in our time, and herein we have looked at just a few of the sermon thoughts based on some of the values found in the book of Hosea!

CHAPTER 5

Introduction To The Book Of Joel

Curtis A. Cates

Introduction

VERY IMPORTANT IN THE study of the “writing” prophets is the study of the book of Joel. Were they merely forthtellers, preachers to the people of their own day, or were they also foretellers, predictors of future events—events which would happen even centuries after they spoke? Modernists have long tried to “late-date” the prophets of the Old Testament, attempting to do away with the predictive, supernatural element (averring that certain “theological” themes had not “evolved” by the early times at which the prophets are conservatively dated). Such liberal, atheistic thought has led to the splintering up of Isaiah (supposedly with various sections written by different authors—“Second Isaiah,” or “Trito-Isaiah,” etc.), has led to the branding of Daniel as “false writing” (**pseudepigrapha**—supposedly, history written after its occurrence, as if it were prophecy), and has led to the late dating of the book under consideration here. The burden of this chapter will be to introduce the prophecy of Joel, with a view to placing major emphasis upon the date of the prophecy (in light of the above considerations and critical implications).

The Author

The student of higher criticism is not surprised that a few have questioned the book's unity, suggesting that it is a concoction of various writers and redactors (editors) from differing times and circumstances, incorporating later Jewish eschatology and apocalyptic thought. Such is a blatant disregard for the book's amazing, beautiful, perfect unity; Joel is its one author.

Not much is revealed concerning Joel; he is differentiated from the other eleven men in the Bible who wear the name, as "Joel ("Jehovah is God," CC), the son of Pethuel ("sincerity of God," CC)" (Joel 1:1). Most importantly, "The word of the Lord...came to Joel" (1:1); he was inspired, a spokesman of God! One looks to internal evidence for further information about him and about his powerful, significant message, whose book is second in the placing of the "minor" (shorter, not less important) prophets in the Old Testament. Joel was a prophet of the southern kingdom, Judah, no doubt living and prophesying in Jerusalem. Very familiar with the temple and its worship, he spoke to the priests as in their presence (1:13-14); he stood where the "solemn assembly" (2:15) would take place, where the congregation would be sanctified and the priests would "weep between the porch and the altar" (2:16-17). Yet, he was not himself a priest, addressing them thus: "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers" (1:13); "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep" (2:17). Note that his calling was not to the northern tribes.

The Date

As suggested earlier, the date of Joel's prophecy has been widely debated, and the divergence in dating has spanned as much as well over half a millennium. Whereas

virtually all the books of prophecy give clearly a historical setting, such as the listing of kings during whose reigns the prophecies were given, Joel does not. Thus it becomes a matter of observing other clues as to its time of writing, opening it up to widely differing results (including much subjective speculation on the part of many). While some hold the dating a matter of conjecture, or of no importance, and while even some “conservative” scholars hesitate to date it early and end up dating it late, this scribe holds the date of Joel to be a critical issue.

Circumstances Of The Book

When Joel’s date is being considered, four conditions that exist at the time of Joel’s prophecy are immediately significant. First, there is no king. Whereas the priests, the people, the old men, the children, the bride, and the bridegroom are addressed, the king is not (Joel 2:14-17). The priests are in authority; they are in the place of influence. Second, the temple is standing. The altar is in service (2:17), and the people are called “into the house of the Lord your God” (1:13-14). The offering had been cut off from the temple (1:9). Third, the walls of the city are standing. The locusts “shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall” (2:9). Fourth, there is no idolatry. They had been worshiping Jehovah God, but their hearts were not in the worship: “rend your heart, and not your garments” (2:13).

In view of the above, Joel must be placed either before the Babylonian exile, at which time the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed (yet when idolatry was not a problem and when there was no king), or after the Babylonian exile, after which time the temple was rebuilt (Zerubbabel’s commission) and after the city and the walls were rebuilt (Nehemiah’s commission). These and other

considerations have caused the proposed dates to vary from as early as 900 B.C. to nearly 200 B.C. Consider now the “evidence” for the late date(s) as opposed to the early date(s).

The Late Date

Liberal, destructive “higher criticism” affirms that Joel could not have prophesied during the pre-exilic period. And some speak of the evidence as very strong, virtually conclusive. What are the grounds for the late date, and how strong is it? Is it motivated largely by prejudice against the supernatural, predictive element in Joel, or is it warranted by the evidence found in the text? Most of the arguments for the late date follow.

One, there is no mention of a king, which fits the disappearance of the monarchy when the kingdom of Judah was exiled in Babylon, after which they had no king. Two, the temple is standing and is fully operating, for the locust plague has cut off the offerings from the worship. This must have been a reference to the temple rebuilt after the captivity (Ezra 1:1-3; 2:lff; 6:1-18). Three, the walls have been rebuilt, for the locusts are climbing over them. This would move the prophecy to after Nehemiah’s commission to rebuild the city with its walls in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, nearly one hundred years after Zerubbabel’s commission in the first year of Cyrus to rebuild the temple (Neh. 2:1; 4:6; 6:15). This would approach the date of as late as 400 B.C. Four, the Babylonian captivity has served God’s intended purpose of removing idolatry from Judah as a national problem, for idolatry is not condemned in the book. This accords well with the days of Ezra, they affirm, who likewise condemned no such sins among Israel. **But** the averment to be proven is, are these four conditions to be found only after the exile?

Five, Joel does not make reference to the ten northern tribes; thus, they have ceased by this time to exist separately. Those addressed in Joel are called “Israel” (Joel 2:27; 3:2, 16) and “Judah” (3:1, 6, 8, et al.). If he had written early, as did Amos and Hosea, for example, he too would have mentioned the northern kingdom. In answer, Joel had no particular reason to refer to the ten tribes, dealing only with Judah. Additionally, the name Israel belonged to Judah also.

Six, that Joel was silent regarding the wickedness of Judah and Israel indicates a late date, spending an unusually small amount of time on morality. This accords better with the early date, as will be noted later.

Seven, the author, or editor, borrowed from earlier prophets, modeling himself after such great writers as Amos, Zephaniah, Second Isaiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, et al. Certain parallels in thought, word, imagery, and ideas are seen between Joel and others of the prophets, indicating that he took their ideas and wove them into a beautiful work, they aver. The prophet simply combined these earlier thoughts with certain other, later eschatological themes to make vivid the stress in which the people found themselves. A later examination of the evidence will show this accusation of evolutionary plagiarism not to be the case. Eight, certain of the enemies mentioned in Joel appear during the post-exilic period, such as the Greeks and the Egyptians. They have replaced the Assyrians and Babylonians as enemies of God’s people. This would fit the later Medo-Persian and even earlier Greek period. However, it will be seen that these peoples were enemies of God very much earlier.

The Early Date

The internal evidence shows that Joel wrote early (the first of the “writing prophets,” unless Obadiah wrote

earlier). In the first place, Joel is quoted by Amos. Indeed, the very sermon text of Amos (Amos 1:2) is a quotation from Joel's almost closing thought (Joel 3:16): "And he said, the Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem." Clearly evident to the reader is the fact that Joel's reference is more full; it flows naturally in the whole context, whereas the text begins abruptly in Amos and ends abruptly. Notice also the more full, flowing statement in Joel 3:18, compared to its quotation in Amos 9:13. Compare also Amos 8:3 with Joel 2:13 and Amos 7:4 with Joel 1:20. It makes sense that one not trained as a prophet might wish to identify himself with the prophet of God who had already written and whose authority was recognized. Since Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and since Amos quoted Joel, then Joel must have prophesied before Uzziah and Jeroboam were contemporaries, or before 760 B.C. In addition, Isaiah makes clear reference to Joel's prophecy, even quoting Joel's prophecy in 13:6 (compare Joel 1:15); this is hardly accidental. Isaiah prophesied in the day of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa. 1:1), 700 B.C. and earlier.

In the second place, the enemies mentioned in Joel are the same as those mentioned by Amos. Amos describes the enemies of Israel (Philistia, Tyre, and Edom) in terms strikingly similar to those in which Joel described them (compare Amos 1 with Joel 3). They were charged with the same sin, and they would receive the same punishment. They had dealt in slave trade; the slaves were God's people (Amos 1:3-12; Joel 3:2-8, 19). When had this happened? Prior to the Babylonian exile? Indeed it had, by hundreds of years (2 Chron. 21), during the time of Jehoram (890 B.C.). Punishment upon the Philistines came about in Uzziah's time (26:6ff—810 B.C.). Thus, Joel must have prophesied between these two approximate dates. See also

2 Kings 8:20-22. Also mentioned as an enemy is Greece, who bought the slaves (Joel 3:6). The slaves were captured by the neighbors of Judah (Philistia, Edom, et al.) and were sold to the “mart of the nations,” Tyre and Sidon (Phoenicia). Phoenicia then sold them to the isles and colonies of Greece. One who wonders about the hostility between Judah and Edom needs to review the history of Esau’s descendants, and the Bible student who doubts Phoenicia’s role needs to review the ability of Tyre to sail the high seas and the fact that Hiram, king of Tyre, taught Solomon how to launch a navy, which made regular trips around Africa, bringing ivory, apes, peacocks, etc. every three years to the palace (1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:11-22). The navy sailed from Ophir to Spain; the King’s Highway went through many nations, including Edom; the Phoenicians travelled that highway. Who can successfully affirm that the Palestinian nations had never heard of Greece during Jehoram’s time? Such would be wild, blind conjecture! Where is the evidence that Judah never had contact with the Grecians before the Babylonian captivity, as the liberals attempt to affirm? Indeed, before Amos—and Joel—the Phoenicians, Philistines, and Edomites had grievously sinned against God’s people, capturing the young men and women and dealing in slave trade.

In the third place, there is no mention of either Assyria, Babylonia, or Syria. The liberals aver that it had been so long since Assyria and Babylonia were enemies of Israel, that it was not fresh on the writer’s memory. But as much damage as they had done to God’s people, one is amazed to think they would be omitted. Rather, these enemies were not yet on the scene. Amos 6:14 does allude to Assyria’s invasion of Israel; Joel does not. And, relative to Syria’s omission, Joel must have prophesied prior to the end of Joash’s reign, for it was then that

the host of Syria came up against him; and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus (2 Chron. 24:23).

Why? “because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash” (24:24). Else Joel would have mentioned Syria. Egypt is mentioned, for she was a threat to Judah; she had attacked during Rehoboam’s time. There is certainly no need to date Joel at the latter part of the Medo-Persian Empire when Egypt is coming to power. One must remember that the nations are not used as instruments of punishment upon His people, Judah, but are cited as under God’s wrath because of their wicked treatment of Judah and are thus told to prepare for God’s judgment upon them. This contrasts often with later enemies of God’s people.

In the fourth place, the placement of Joel in the Hebrew canon and in the Old Testament bespeaks an early date. It is grouped with the pre-exile prophets also in the Septuagint. Why would the inspired Ezra and others have likely considered the book early if it was written late? The text used by Christ and His disciples placed Joel with the other early prophets, between the ancient books of Hosea and Amos.

In the fifth place, the circumstances of the book fit excellently the minority of Joash, king of Judah.

1. There is no mention of a king. When did a king come into his majority? Although Josiah came to his throne at age eight, he did not actually begin to function as king until he was sixteen (2 Chron. 34:1-3), when “he began to seek after the God of David his father.” Likewise, in the reign of Joash, the boy king came to his throne at age seven, reigning forty years in Jerusalem (24:1ff). But, for a period of nine years, until age sixteen (like Josiah), he would have

been in his minority. Who oversaw the government during that time? “And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (24:2). Why did they bury Jehoiada the priest in the city of David among the kings? “because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and his house” (24:16). Why, later, when King Joash died, did they not bury him among the kings?

For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men; and Jehovah delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers. So they executed judgment upon Joash (24:24).

After Jehoiada’s death, Joash became very wicked, forsook God, slew the sons of Jehoiada who warned about the wickedness, and forsook God’s house. He thus was killed by his own servants, “and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings” (24:25). The necessary implication is that, for all intents and purposes, he served very prominently in the place of Joash during his minority—therefore, the call for the priests et al., not for the king.

2. Since this was more than two hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar’s three carryings away (605, 597, 586 B.C.), during the final one of which the temple and walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, the house of God is still standing, and the walls are standing.

3. Further, when Jehoiada the priest came into prominence, the temple worship was restored: “And Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him” (2 Kings 12:2). The house of God was repaired (12:12-14); idolatry was not practiced in God’s house, but rather “they offered burnt-offerings in the house of Jehovah continually all the days of Jehoiada” (2 Chron. 24:14). What a contrast this was to the deplorable condition prior to Jehoiada!

Jehoram had reigned in an evil way, as had the house of Ahab (2 Chron. 21:6). Because of the Davidic covenant, God did not destroy David's house (21:7). Jehoram "led Judah astray" (21:11), dying a grievous death (21:15). Ahaziah, his son, was no better; he followed his wicked mother Athaliah's advice, and God slew him (22:2-9). Athaliah usurped the kingdom, destroying the seed royal (22:10). Only the stealing away of the baby Joash by Jehoshabeath, the wife of Jehoiada, preserved his life to be the next king (22:11). Through Jehoiada's influence, the people proclaimed Joash king (23:1-11); Jehoiada had "strengthened himself." The people slew the usurper (23:15). It was then that the house of Baal was broken down, with its altars and images. The false priest, Mattan, was slain (23:17): "And Jehoiada made a covenant between himself, and all the people, and the king, that they should be Jehovah's people" (23:16). No unclean person could enter the temple (23:19).

So the four major conditions in Joel fit exactly with the minority of Joash while he was strongly influenced by the faithful and influential priest, Jehoiada, and before they reverted back to idolatry; the reformation was somewhat on the surface and temporary, it seems; thus, Joel was calling for the people to "rend your heart (your deeper spirituality, CC), and not your garments (the outward evidence of spirituality had to be accompanied by genuine, inward repentance, CC)" (Joel 2:13). The liberals affirm that the absence of wickedness in Joel indicates a late date; however, that simply indicates that he wrote before Amos and Hosea, who do condemn the wickedness which reappeared in the latter part of Joash's reign and persisted in Judah, as it existed in the northern kingdom. This is an argument rather for the early date, which was approximately 840 to 830 B.C.

In the sixth place, the valley of Jehoshaphat is surely a reference to the recent battle of King Jehoshaphat against the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites in the Valley of Berachah (2 Chron. 20). It was here, upon Jehoshaphat's having prayed for deliverance, that God delivered His people from these nations who would have cast them out of the promised land. It was God's battle, which He won marvelously. It was thus after Jehoshaphat's days, who became king around 914, yet close enough for the victory to be quite fresh in their minds.

The unbiased mind can see that no strong objection can be raised to the early date of Joel; indeed, rather, the whole tenor of the prophecy and the historical background point convincingly to the time before Amos and Hosea.

The Style

The book of Joel is written in a beautiful, flowing, and energetically picturesque style. Its unity and vividness are amazingly powerful, as the prophet moves from detail to detail, from image to image, from metaphor to metaphor.

The Message

Joel is brokenhearted; he mourns for the people, calling for them to repent. Judah cannot stand the plague of locusts which is destroying everything in their path. One has but to study Amos 7:1-9 to see the severity of a locust plague. Since Israel could not stand a locust plague (when measured by God's plumbline and found to be woefully wicked and short of God's standard), Amos begged that God use a lighter punishment. Since Israel could not endure the second alternative, fire (drought, a burning up of the fields by an intense lack of water), Amos begged for a still lighter punishment. The third alternative was the sword (foreign army). God was serious; Judah deserved

great punishment. However, “Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent” (Joel 2:14), if Judah would repent.

God would not only bless them momentarily, if they would repent, but the prophet went on to foretell of the ultimate blessing to come, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. Whosoever would call upon the name of the Lord in the Church Age would be saved. However, Joel also foretold of grievous punishments that would come upon those nations who had scattered His people, who had and would oppose His cause.

Areas Of Emphasis

A first message involves the “day of the Lord (the first to use this phrase, CC)” (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). This had immediate reference to the actual, literal locust plague which was upon them and “army” used by Jehovah to bring them to repentance. There would be other “days of the Lord” to come, wherein God’s faithful would be delivered and His enemies would be destroyed. Ultimately, of course, will come the final “Day of the Lord,” the day in which all the world will be judged (John 5:28-29; Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:11-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:12).

A second message, to which earlier reference was made, is that the last days (the Gospel Dispensation—Heb. 1:1-3) would see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32). In this panorama of the Church Age, Joel specifically speaks of the event which happened on Pentecost of Acts 2, in which the apostles were baptized by the Holy Spirit and thereby were guided into all truth and were empowered to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; 16:18-19; 18:18; John 20:21-23; Luke 22:28-30) and were empowered to lay hands on others [the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12)], whereby

others (without respect of worldly stature, sex, etc.) could perform miracles. Of course, built in naturally with the ability of only the apostles to impart those gifts was the cessation of those gifts when the last apostle died. Peter on Pentecost made it clear: “This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

A third message is that outward obedience (though absolutely necessary) is not enough. They were not practicing idolatry, and their external activities in the worship to God were not condemned; however, they were to purify their hearts through repentance. Simply having a clean outer garment was not enough.

Conclusion

Perhaps more Christians, even Gospel preachers and Christian college educators, lose their faith and their conviction relative to the Old Paths in the study of the prophets than in any other field. One who studies at the feet of modernists is going to be vexed daily at the unrelenting attacks of modernistic professors on such prophets as Joel. Atheists despise and hate the supernatural element in the Word. Blessed is he who can study at the feet of such scoffers and at the same time not question and even lose his faith in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Word, who does not “redefine” it to where it is absolutely meaningless and without teeth. When he does, he has dug his own grave and, unfortunately, has become worthless, even very dangerous, to those young people who will study at his feet. It is still true—“the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). It does, however, break those who tamper with its Divine inspiration and authority!

CHAPTER 6

Commentary On The Book Of Joel

W. Terry Varner

Introduction

THE PROPHET *JOEL* BEGINS his great book with the gloom of a locust plague greater than any plague Israel had experienced before or will experience (Joel 1:2-3; 2:2). The plague represented God's Divine judgment upon the sins of Judah. The Divine judgment emphasized the meaning of Joel's name, "Jehovah is God." Joel sets forth the purpose, authority, benevolence, kindness, mercy, and supremacy of God. God rules; men are amenable.

Out of the terror of the locust plague and Divine judgment is hope and light not only for Judah, but for "all flesh." God is glorified in Joel's message of hope and salvation. Joel reveals God's grace through the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" upon "all flesh" (2:28-3:21), which began on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21) and culminates in the last, final Judgment of "all flesh," known as "the day of the Lord" (Joel 3:14). Between the "outpouring of the Spirit" on Pentecost and "the day of the Lord," God brings His judgment upon all who trouble spiritual Israel. The book closes with victory and triumph.

The book of Joel divides itself into two major sections: (1) the calamity on Judah (1:1-2:14) and (2) blessings for Israel (2:15-3:21).

The Calamity On Judah (1:1-2:14)

The Locust Scourge (1:1-4)

1:1: “The word of the Lord came.” The phrase identifies (1) the contents—“the word of the Lord”; (2) the “source”—“the word of the Lord,” as Divine revelation, not human; (3) the messenger—“Joel, the son of Pethuel.” Nothing more is known of either Joel or Pethuel. “Joel” means “Jehovah is God.” “Pethuel” means “the openheartedness or sincerity of God.”¹ Apparently, the identity is used here to distinguish the prophet from the dozen or so other Biblical characters by the same name.

1:2: Joel addresses all of Judah: (1) the “old men,” or older, experienced members of Judah, not the “elders” of Judah, and (2) “All ye inhabitants of the land,” or all Judah.

1:3: The locust calamity and its subsequent effects were so severe that all Israel was urged to maintain the experience in their history by passing it from one generation to the next. It would remind the subsequent generations of God’s judgment and serve as a “deterrent to sin.”² The verse is similar in meaning to Moses’ instruction to Israel (cf. Exod. 10:2), but nothing in their past or future is comparable (cf. Joel 2:2).

1:4: Joel lists four of the twelve Hebrew terms for varieties of locusts: (1) “the palmerworm” (**Gazam**) cutting, (2) “the locust” (**Arbeh**) swarming, (3) “the cankerworm” (**Yeleg**) hopping, (4) “the caterpillar” (**Chasil**) destroying. These are in reverse order in 2:25. What one swarm of locusts “ate and left,” the next “came and ate,” until the invasion of the locusts, as an army (2:1-11), had devastated the land. They came and destroyed “before our eyes” (1:16). Various examples of locust plagues have been studied and illustrated in **National Geographic** magazine,³ and the student of Joel will profit from reading these accounts for his understanding of the development, power, and

destruction of locust plague. Keep in mind, however, the locust plague of Joel was a “destruction from the Almighty” (1:15) by “his army” (2:11), and none like it has occurred before or since (2:2). Emphasized is the exceptional nature of the locust plague in Joel’s time.

Joel’s Call For Repentance (1:5-14)

1:5: “Awake”: an admonition. “Weep”: be penitent of heart. “Howl”: acknowledge sin. Joel calls for repentance of (1) the “drunkards” and (2) the “people” who desired “new wine,” or the fresh juice of the grape (Isa. 65:8). The drunkard believed his needs were met in strong drink, and the people found great joy in the new wine, but Joel implies one’s real needs are met in God. Dependence on the juice of the grape was to be “cut off.”

1:6: The locusts are personified and viewed collectively as “a nation come upon my land,” or strong, numerous. They will be as a “great people” (2:2) and as an “army” (2:11, 25). Their strength and weapons are as “the teeth of a lion.” Their teeth, though tiny and in proportion to their small bodies, are as strong as a lion’s. As God’s instruments of judgment, they are able to consume, destroy, and devastate the crops and land and heap misery on the people. God speaks of His locusts (2:25) coming “upon my land.” It is “my land” (1:6), “my vine,” and “my fig tree” (1:7). Joel speaks for God, the Owner of the land, the Giver and Sustainer of all things (cf. Psm. 24:1; Job 41:11; Psm. 50:12; 1 Cor. 10:26). God’s gifts to the people are to be destroyed.

1:7: Destroyed are “my vine” and “my fig tree,” which were symbols of peace, prosperity, and pride among Israel.⁴ Joel describes the destruction by the locusts as wasting the vine and barking the fig tree. The branches of the trees are barkless and gleaming white.

1:8: The destruction from the invasion of locusts should produce “lament” or mourning among the people. The grief is to be deep, intense, poignant, and comparable to the personal bereavement of an espoused virgin who lost her husband before the marriage was consummated. Joel calls for “godly sorrow that worketh repentance” (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

1:9: Joel appeals to Judah through the temple services which were the center of life. The devastation of vegetation (Joel 1:7, 18-20) and the difficulties of keeping flocks (1:18-20) suspended the daily temple services. The “meat offering” and the “drink offering” involved a lamb each morning and evening mingled with flour, oil, and wine (Exod. 29:38-40; Num. 28:3-8; Lev. 2:1). Their sins “cut off” their offerings to God and interrupted their fellowship with God. He could no longer meet them (Exod. 29:42-46). Coffman states:

The seriousness of this cessation of the daily offerings was inherent in the people’s conviction that by the various means of those sacrifices their fellowship with God was perpetuated and maintained.⁵

This caused the priests to mourn because they (1) no longer could exercise their office, (2) realized the seriousness of the need for daily sacrifices, and (3) experienced the loss of their livelihood.

1:10-12: The “field is wasted”—it does not produce. The vineyards are “dried” up and the olive trees are “barked” so that there are no fruit and oil. The destruction and devastation are thorough. Nothing escapes; even the “joy of the sons of men” (1:12, 16) is destroyed. The farmer’s crops failed. The trees withered. The destruction produced sorrow, or “shame...howls” (1:11). Joel’s description of the devastation of the locusts

is confirmed by Conley's words, "The locusts destroyed everything: the trees, the leaves, and the grass."⁶

1:13-14: With both material and spiritual starvation upon the people, Joel calls for repentance to begin at the center of their life, the temple. Joel begins where repentance must begin—in the people's hearts. They could do nothing to restore their losses physically, but repenting and doing God's will began correction of their spiritual problems.

Addressing the "priests" (1:13), they were to dress in "sackcloth," the customary clothing of mourning and repentance (2 Kings 19:1-2; Lam. 2:10). This cloth was normally made from weaving goat and camel hair. They were to "lie all night" in sackcloth before the altar in penitence and "howl"—that is, wail, lament, and pray with loud crying to God.

The night of wailing was to be followed by: (1) calling "a fast" (1:14). Fasting demands concentrating upon the spiritual and subordinating the physical (cf. Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-29); (2) a "solemn assembly" (Joel 1:14) of all the people to the temple. The "elders" (see 1:2-4) were probably to declare to the assembly that the great calamity was from God. Knowledge that the locust plague was a judgment from God would produce penitence and petitions to God.

The Day Of The Lord (1:15-20)

1:15: The destruction by the locusts was to be understood as "from the Almighty." It is described as "the day of the Lord" or "the day of Jehovah" (ASV). The phrase is used five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14), describing God's judgment on sin.

While all the days are God's, all are also ours in the sense that we have a stewardship of time and responsibility (Eph. 5:16; 1 Cor. 4:6). The phrase "the day of the Lord" is

a “time of judgment” appointed by God in relation to how we use our days, life, or time. Being free moral agents, we may choose to use our days, life, or time either for evil or righteousness. To the wicked and sinful and to the unbeliever, the day of the Lord is a day of vengeance, whereas, to the righteous and godly, it is a day of salvation (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 1:18-19; 2:5-10; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Heb. 8:8-13).

It is a day in which God’s omnipotence, benevolence, and justice is expressed in His sovereignty and His severity (Rom. 11:22). It involves not only the last, final day, or Day of Judgment, but also the many forerunners and types of that day in every judgment of God upon men. The phrase is used “by the prophets to designate a judgment from God...a day of terror to the enemies of God but a day of deliverance to the people of God.”⁷

1:16-20: Joel shows their situation is hopeless and the people helpless. He appeals to the evidence before their eyes. The severity of the locust plague is compounded by drought. Cattle die (Joel 1:16). Seed rots (1:17). The cattle and sheep groan (1:18-20). Water is scarce (1:20). To further compound their problems, fire destroys whatever vegetation remains (1:19). Their “joy and gladness” (1:16) are gone (cf. Deut. 12:7).

Their sin is described as affecting the whole of creation. The countryside is depicted as mourning (Joel 1:10-12, 16-20; cf. Rom. 8:22). We should be humbled when brute beasts, who are innocent and without soul and conscience, suffer in God’s visitations on man in His judgments. A contrast is set forth showing the response of the brute beasts and the insensitivity of the people. Their suffering did not awaken the people to their sins. Joel cries out in behalf of the people (Joel 1:19), showing men are amenable to God and only in Him do we have the answer to our helplessness and hopelessness.

The Warning (2:1-3)

2:1: The call for repentance (1:3-14) and an examination of the evidence which the people knew (1:16-20) is followed with the command to “blow ye the trumpet in Zion...sound the alarm...let all the inhabitants tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh.” Zion represents the dwelling place of God. The text implies that safety and salvation are with God. The “blowing of the trumpet” in Numbers 10:1-10 served Israel by calling (1) an assembly (10:2), (2) the people to the tabernacle (10:3), (3) Israel to begin their journey (10:2, 5-8), (4) an alarm to war and danger (10:9), and (5) a holy assembly at festival time (10:10). It is used here in the sense of an “alarm” of the coming judgment of God, as in Hosea 5:8 and 8:1.

2:2-3: “Darkness” can be both (1) literal, in the sense that the numerous locusts darkened the sky, and (2) symbolic of the judgment of God. Before the locust plagues, the land was “as the garden of Eden” (2:3), but the locusts devastated everything as they invaded in waves, and “nothing shall escape them” (vv. 2-3).

The Description Of The Locust Plague (2:4-11)

2:4-11: The earlier reference to the **National Geographic** magazine articles in endnote three verify Joel’s description in these verses. They are described as God’s “army” (2:11). Their appearance is as “horses” (2:4)—numerous, strong. Their sound is as “chariots” and “fire” that crackles as it burns the stubble (2:5).

They create despair and anguish on the people (2:6). They are unstoppable (2:7-9). They execute God’s commands without interfering with one another (2:8). Their number is so great that they darken the sky which gives light (2:10). This is typical Biblical language which is often used to describe God’s judgments on nations as they fall (cf. Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 22:25; Rev.

6:12-14). Under the command and direction of God, the destruction is “great and very terrible” (Joel 2:11). God’s power and judgment are described as “who can abide?” (2:11).

The Call To Repentance (2:12-14)

2:12-14: The destruction and judgment by God’s army do not offset God’s decree for the need of repentance and embracing Him. In despair and destruction, there is hope if they “turn and repent.”

Repentance is described three times: (1) “turn ye even to me with all your heart” (2:12), (2) “rend your heart,...and turn to the Lord” (2:13), and (3) “return and repent” (2:14). David states that repentance involves the heart: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psm. 51:17). Contingent upon their receiving God’s “mercy, ...grace,...kindness” (Joel 2:13) is their repentance (cf. Exod. 34:6-7). Repentance involves turning from sin and embracing God’s will. God’s change of will “is the result of a change of will and conduct on their part.”⁸ Their repentance resulted in “meat and drink offerings” (Joel 2:14). How, if all had been destroyed? God would bless them (2:18-27).

Blessings For Israel (2:15-3:21)

Their Repentance And Removal Of Locusts (2:15-27)

2:15-17: Their repentance is to be followed by the “blowing of the trumpet in Zion” (2:15), not as an alarm as in 2:1, but to assemble all the people and to sanctify a fast. The repentance would keep them from being mocked by the heathen who would say, “where is their God?” (2:17; cf. Deut. 28:36-46): “The priests are called upon to appeal

to the Lord's 'tender nerve': 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach and a by-word among the nations' (2:18)."⁹

2:18-20: Joel's success in getting Judah to repent is implied. The message of the terribleness of the judgment by the elders (1:14) and the prayers of the priests and people brought repentance. God will now be merciful to His people and land (2:18). In 1:8, 11, 13 and 2:1, judgment by the locusts is a reality, but now Divine compassion prevails. Their repentance brings renewal of crops (2:19) and the removal of the "northern army" (2:20), the direction from which the locusts came. As God commanded His army of locusts to destroy, He now commands their complete and total destruction. They were driven from Judah into the eastern sea (Dead Sea) and the western sea (Mediterranean Sea). The "stench" from their decay shows "judgment brings its dire consequences and leaves its reminders."¹⁰

2:21-27: The Lord "will do great things" (2:21). Food and crops will be available again for both man and beasts. God sends the needed rains (2:23), resulting in an abundance of temporal blessings for the people which had been lost during the plague (2:24-26). The mention of the early and latter rains is closely connected to God's promise (cf. Deut. 11:13-15; Lev. 26:3-4; Psm. 65:9-10). The people will be satisfied and praise God (Joel 2:26). Twice within two verses, Joel assures them that "my people shall never be ashamed" (2:26-27). This must be understood as contingent upon their "continued faithfulness to Him."¹¹ This passage is used by Paul in this manner of the spiritual blessings upon Christians (cf. Rom. 10:11, 13). God is "in the midst of Israel" and is their "God" (Joel 2:27). His sovereignty and their amenability are stated.

The Outpouring Of The Spirit (2:28-32)

2:28-29: The beginning of the Messianic or Christian Age is stated in the terms, “And it shall come to pass afterward” (2:28). After the temporal blessings were poured out, spiritual blessings were to follow. The scope of the spiritual blessings is expressed as universal: “and I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:28), or mankind, Jew and Gentile. The remainder of 2:28-29 emphasizes the universal membership in the Christian Age as “**all flesh**” (emp. mine, WTV)—“sons and daughters, old and young, servants and handmaidens.”

It is the case that God’s people of the Christian Age are a spiritual nation or kingdom of “**all flesh**,” and not the fleshly nation of Israel. We must look for its beginning, composition, and fulfillment. The “outpouring of the Spirit” (2:28) occurred in Acts 2 and on the house of Cornelius in Acts 10—Jew and Gentile; therefore, as Joel states, it was on “**all flesh**,” or universal. Peter gives the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel’s promise of the spiritual nation in the events of Pentecost by stating, “**this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel**” (Acts 2:16), and, in Acts 2:17-21, quotes Joel 2:28-32. The composition of the spiritual nation is stated by Joel as being without distinction of sex, age, and social order: (1) “sons and daughters” (cf. Acts 2:17; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), (2) “old men and young men,” and (3) “servants and handmaidens” (cf. Gal. 3:28). The terms “prophecy, dreams, and visions” (Joel 2:28) refer to the various miraculous workings of the Spirit.

2:30-31: These verses describe the coming of the last and final judgment of God on humanity, “the great and the terrible day of the Lord” (2:31). Between the coming (beginning) of the Messianic age with the outpouring of the Spirit on “all flesh” at Pentecost (Acts 2) and the conclusion of the Messianic Age, described as “the great

and terrible day of the Lord,” Joel describes the general judgments of God, typical of the last, final Day of Judgment.

It is our studied position that the time statements of “it shall come to pass afterward” (2:28) and “I will show...and shall be” (2:30-31) demand an application of 2:30-31 to occur within the duration of the Christian Age. Admittedly, God does judge various nations in time. This is evident from various texts (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Jer. 4:23; Ezek. 32:1-8; Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Rev. 6:17-18). The context is the judgment of God during the Christian Age. Hailey captures the meaning of God’s judgments:

So, the outpouring of the Spirit and His work for the redemption and salvation of man would result in judgment on those who rejected His message. The rejection of the truth of the Spirit by the Jews, and their persecution of Christians, became the forerunner by the Romans, A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem, which fulfilled the prophecy, in turn becomes a prophetic type of the ultimate end of the world and of the judgment of God on the world of the ungodly—that is, on those who reject the Spirit in refusing to hear His Word.¹²

2:32: “And it shall come to pass”—that is, during the Christian Age and beginning with the outpouring of the Spirit, the blessing of deliverance and salvation is offered to all: “**Whosoever** shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.” The phrase as used in Acts (22:16; 2:37-41) means to respond to or obey the Law and Gospel of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16; 8:2; Gal. 6:2). **All** spiritual blessings and all things that pertain to life and godliness are in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:4). Salvation and deliverance are located “in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.” See Hebrews 12:22-23, where we “are come to Mount Zion,...Jerusalem.”

All Wrongs Avenged (3:1-8)

3:1: “For” connects the things which follow to the things that have been said in 2:30-32. This is confirmed by “in those days, and in that time.” “Days” (plural) and “that time” suggest the period of time of the Christian Age rather than a specific day or point in time. “When I shall bring again captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” is to be understood in the light of (1) the Messianic prophecy that God shall “set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left” (Isa. 11:11); (2) the statement of Jesus “to preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18); and (3) the statements of Paul, “There is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5) and “He led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8).

This phrase and chapter are not applicable to the return from Babylonian captivity for the following reasons. (1) It occurs within the Christian Age, which Joel has been describing (Joel 2:28-32; 3:1). (2) James applies this section to the Christian Age (Acts 15:12-18). It began with the preaching of the Gospel to the Jew first, then to the Greek, on Pentecost (Acts 2; 13:46; Rom. 1:16) to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). “All flesh” (Joel 2:28) everywhere and for all time is amenable to the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 8:2) in order to receive forgiveness and fellowship (1 John 1).

3:2-3: “The valley of Jehoshaphat” literally means “Jehovah judges”¹³ (cf. Joel 3:12). This is not a reference to a literal valley, as its physical location is uncertain, but is used here symbolically to describe God’s judgments on behalf of spiritual Israel—“my people, my heritage,...my land.” Since it is a universal judgment, “I gather all nations” describes the ongoing judgment of God against those nations who have been cruel to spiritual Israel (3:3). He vindicates spiritual Israel, and in Him there is hope and strength (cf. 3:16).

3:4-8: Judgment is taken against “Tyre, Sidon, Philistia” (3:8; cf. Amos 1:6-12), which serve as an example of wickedness of those who would inflict cruelty on spiritual Israel. “If ye recompense me” (3:8) (i.e., my people), I will bring “swift and speedily” (3:4) judgment on you. We reap what we sow (Gal. 6:6-8; Rev. 22:11). Joel 3:7-8 presents a difficulty in looking for the fulfillment. It occurred “in those days” (Joel 3:1; 2:28-29) of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, or the Christian Era. We cannot document these verses with a literal, historical event. Hailey reasons for the following understanding:

Neither could Jews after the flesh or spiritual Israel have done this, for it would have been physically impossible for the one and morally impossible for the other...It would not be literal or physical selling, but an avenging by divine judgment of the shameful treatment inflicted on the people of the Lord.¹⁴

The Divine Challenge To The Nations (3:9-17)

3:9-10: Joel’s thought returns to “all nations” (3:2, 11-12). They are to “Prepare war” (3:9). This is a challenge to the nations to make war against His children by making implements of war and thinking themselves undefeatable—“strong” (3:10). The figure set forth in 3:10 describes the evil attitudes and hearts of the enemy. These are reversed in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, where the reign of Christ is described as making peace in the heart of His people (cf. Rom. 14:17).

3:11-12: Joel calls for the nations to “assemble, come,...gather” (3:11a) and then calls for God to defeat them (3:11b). They are to come to “the valley of Jehoshaphat” (3:12), meaning “Jehovah judges,” as “I sit to judge all the heathen” (3:12).

3:13: The nations are ripe for the judgment of God. Two metaphors are used to describe the judgment (both

borrowed from farming): (1) The grain is ripe and ready to be harvested by the sickle, as in Isaiah 17:5; (2) The vineyards are ripe with the grapes ready to be trodden, as in Isaiah 63:3. These metaphors describe the nations who are ready for God's judgment—"For their wickedness is great." Coffman describes the final judgment of humanity as occurring "at a time when human wickedness has run its course, borne its fruit, and arrived at a state where there is nothing else left to do except to reap it."¹⁵

3:14-17: The prophet teaches the all-important lesson in the life of man: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" (3:14). We ever move toward the "day of the Lord" (3:14). We are ever in "Verdict Valley." The battle is not with carnal weapons, but with the heart and soul of man. As the "**day of the Lord**" approaches and comes, that day will find "sun,...moon,...stars" (3:15) giving no light; thus, doom!

As God's army of locusts brought judgment on Judah under His command, so God directs the "Day of Judgment." As man and time march toward this last, final "day of the Lord," the ray of hope, light, deliverance, and security is in "Zion, and...Jerusalem" (3:16). "No strangers pass through her any more" (3:16) shows spiritual Zion (the church) is impregnable, in contrast to the physical city of Jerusalem! (cf. Matt. 16:18). While "the heavens and the earth shall shake" (3:16), spiritual Israel, the church/kingdom, shall not shake (cf. Heb. 12:28). While the nations of the earth fall, holy and spiritual Israel shall stand (Joel 3:17; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14).

Spiritual Israel's Happiness (3:18-21)

3:18-21: "In that day" refers to the Christian Era (Joel 2:28-3:17; Acts 2). Metaphorically, it describes the abundance of spiritual blessings for those in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3). The Messiah and Saviour and His way provide

refreshing joys and life (cf. John 4:13-15; 7:37-39; 14:6; 1 Cor. 10:1-5). The New Testament sums up these blessings as (1) "In whom ye are made full" (Col. 2:10); (2) "Filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19); (3) "All spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (1:3); (4) "Hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3); (5) "The peace of God which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7); (6) "The love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19).

3:19: Both "Egypt" and "Edom" were longtime enemies of fleshly Israel. They represent emptiness, wickedness, hopelessness, helplessness, and evil of being out of the kingdom of God. Christ and the Christian Era render the enemies of God and His people impotent (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 8:31-39).

3:20: "Judah" and "Jerusalem" represent the "remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 2:32-3:1), spiritual Israel. They are not condemned but "are more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:31-39) because we are not forsaken (Heb. 13:5). So will it be to the faithful throughout the Christian era.

3:21: At the "day of the Lord," God, by means of the last, final Judgment, will avenge the saints by judging the blood of those who oppress His saints. The saints are victorious "for the Lord dwelleth in Zion." The book closes on a victorious note of complete triumph and victory. God is with us (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:8).

What Then?

When all the great plants of our cities have
turned out their last finished work;
When our merchants have sold their last yard
of silk, and dismissed the tired, weary clerk;
When our banks have taken in their last dollar,
and declared their last dividend;

When the Judge of the World says, "Close for the night":
and asks for a balance,—**What then?**

When the people have sung their last anthem,
and the preacher has said his last prayer;
When the people have heard their last sermon,
and the sound has died out on the air;
When the Bible lies closed on the pulpit,
and the pews are all empty of men;
When we all stand facing the record,
and the Great Book is opened,—**What Then?**

When the actor has played his last drama,
and the mimic has made his last fun;
When the film has flashed its last picture,
and the billboard displayed its last run;
When the crowds seeking pleasure have
vanished,
and gone out in the darkness again;
When the Trumpet of All Ages is sounded,
and we all stand before God,—**What Then?**

When the bugle's last call sinks in silence,
and the long, marching columns stand still;
When the Captain has given his last orders,
and they've captured the last fort and hill;
When the flag has been hauled from the
masthead,
and the wounded soldiers have all checked in;
When a world that rejected its Saviour is asked
for a reason—**What then?**

—Author unknown

Endnotes

1 Keil, **Commentary on the Old Testament**, Volume 10, p. 169.

2 Jacob M. Myers, **Layman's Bible Commentary**, p. 77.

3 John D. Whiting, "Jerusalem's Locust Plagues," **National Geographic**, Volume 28 (1915), pp. 511-550; Robert A. M. Conley, "Teeth of the Wind," **National Geographic**, Volume 126 (1969), pp. 202-227.

4 Josephus, **Wars**, 3:10:8.

- p. 17.
- 5 Burton Coffman, **The Minor Prophets**, Volume 1,
 - 6 Conley, p. 220.
 - 7 Homer Hailey, **The Minor Prophets**, p. 36.
 - 8 Ibid, p. 50.
 - 9 Jack Lewis, **The Minor Prophets**, p. 100.
 - 10 Hailey, p. 51.
 - 11 Ibid, p. 52.
 - 12 Ibid, pp. 54-55.
 - 13 Keil, p. 220.
 - 14 Hailey, p. 58.
 - 15 Coffman, p. 67.

CHAPTER 7

Great Lessons From The Book Of Joel

Harrell Davidson

Introduction

A *STUDY OF THE* Minor Prophets is most interesting. For several years we have presented lessons from the Minor Prophets with the title “The Minor Prophets, B.C. or 1990” (whatever the year might have been). Why? There is so much in the Minor Prophets that seems to be so current. Many of the conditions that existed then regarding the people are about the same today. Sin is always the same, regardless of the time frame in which we are studying. People are also the same. The times of the prophets may be remote by some standards, but the need of the people is still the same.

It appears that Joel is perhaps the first of the written prophets. We realize that many date the book all the way to one of the last, but the evidence seems to point to a much earlier date. The background may have well been the period in 2 Kings 11 and 12. This was a period when some friendship had been established between Judah and Israel. Before looking at the “meat” of the book of Joel, let us examine the background of the prophets.

A prophet is one unto whom the Lord gave His Word. Samuel did not understand the call of God because he did not yet know God when God was calling

on him. In 1 Samuel 3:7, the Bible says, "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him." From this we also learn that a prophet is one that had the Word of God revealed unto him. In 1 Samuel 3:10, after Eli has spoken to Samuel and told him what to do and to say if what Samuel was hearing was the "call" (v. 9) of the Lord, the Bible says, "And the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth." We now learn that, if God says nothing, the prophet has nothing to say. God had to reveal Himself and His Word to the prophet in order for the prophet to speak. A prophet was one who spoke for God. It is not the case that a prophet only spoke of things in the future. In fact, they spoke in all three tenses: past, present, and future. One would do well to remember that the true prophet was one for God and one who spoke His Word faithfully.

Elijah was a prophet that came on the scene in obscurity. In 1 Kings 17 we learn that he was a Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead. The same was true with him as with Samuel and the rest of the prophets: "The word of the Lord came unto him saying" (17:2). Many of the prophets had an obscure background. There is a great lesson in this fact as we approach the study of Joel. Joel was also an obscure prophet for, in Joel 1:1, the Bible says, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." This is all we know about him. Many wore the name which means "Jehovah is God." The lesson we learn is that a person does not have to be big or little, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, in order to speak for God. The acid test is, can he speak what God bids him to speak? We must be careful, therefore, not to follow a man because of who he is or what good name he has, but the matter must be, does he speak for God? Does he teach what the Scriptures teach? Does he speak the Truth? God does not

look on the person, but on the heart. When God speaks to Joel and tells him what to say, Joel must speak what God commands in order to be judged faithful.

God Had Warned In The Past

One should read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 to see what God's judgment would be when men obeyed or disobeyed. Leviticus deals with God telling the people that they shall not make idols or graven images, for He was their God. In verses three through thirteen, God made certain promises to them if they obeyed Him. Verse fourteen introduces what would happen if they disobeyed God. God said:

I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it (Lev. 26:16).

Terror would be the rule of the day for disobedience. God would then and there judge them for their wrong. Verse twenty shows their strength being spent in vain and the land not yielding the increase. The trees would not yield their fruit.

In Deuteronomy 28:1-2, the Bible says:

And it shall come to pass if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all of these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.

The blessings that will “overtake” them if they hearkened unto God's will are then proclaimed. Among these God shows that the land would be “plenteous” in

produce (v. 11). These verses represent God's judgment on the people for obedience. God's judgment against Israel starts in verse fifteen when Israel would "not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." Notice verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine of Deuteronomy 28:

Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field,
and shall gather but little in; for the locust shall
consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and
dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine,
nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat
them.

"All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume" (v. 42). In verses forty-five and forty-six, the curses would "pursue thee, and overtake thee." Here is God's judgment pronounced against Israel. Just as His goodness would be demonstrated for their obedience through blessings overtaking them, His curses would pursue and overtake them. This is precisely what Joel is reporting in chapter one. If we can get this background from Leviticus and Deuteronomy in our minds, we will have no difficulty understanding Joel.

God promised an agricultural judgment, among other things, against Israel. This would also include Judah.

Joel asks the people if they had ever seen anything like this in their day. "Nothing like this before" is Joel's reply. Tell it to your children and to your children's children. Don't forget this depression, for you brought it upon yourself. So many people miss the point when they try to explain the locust in Joel 1:4 as being four different nations. Let us be true to the Bible and see the locust as God's judgment against a sinful people described in four different stages. Four kinds of locust are in consideration. There was the **gazam**, or cutting locust; the **arbeh**, or swarming locust; **yeleg**, or hopping locust; and the **chasil**, or destroying locust. This represents the idea of what one

left, the other ate. The vine and the tree are wasted. The bark of the tree was eaten. The field was wasted with the corn grains lying there under dry clods of dirt. There was no rain to produce the germination of the seed and, if there had been rain, the locust would have taken care of the crop. What are they to do?

They are to understand that this is God's judgment against them for their disobedience. Five times in seventy-three verses, Joel will speak of the day of the Lord. Joel 1:15 is a sample: "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." Joel interprets the judgment of God. Joel is also a prophet of penitence. He calls on the nation to repent. We may rest assured that everywhere there is a call to repentance, there is also the call to judgment. This comes about because of sin.

The number one problem with Judah was heart trouble. The same thing is true in our day. Solomon said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). God knows the heart of all men (cf. Acts 1:24). It is from within the heart of men that evil thoughts and sins of various kinds come (cf. Mark 7:21-23). If their heart was the problem, what are they to do about it? "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of evil" (Joel 2:13). What a description of God! Where could we turn and find a better one? Oh, what a mighty and loving God we have! His grace and mercy are wonderful. He is slow to get angry with us. He is so kind to us. Joel becomes the prophet of hope. Joel appeals to God for the priests and ministers to show their penitence so that the heathen would not think that God was powerless and that idolatry prevailed. The Lord would do great things if they would repent. The rain will come, the

earth will produce its bounty, and the people would be blessed beyond their expectations. As sure as God could bring the great pestilence against them, one like they had never seen before, He could abundantly bless them in ways they had not experienced.

The years of loss from the locust would be restored. Think about all of the loss. When repentance is evident, God is able to bless significantly. Joel 2:27 contains some of the most beautiful language to the human ear: “And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.” Dear God, if all men everywhere would be unashamed and unafraid to proclaim repentance and salvation to a lost and dying world, what a difference it would make in this old, sinful world. Joel puts many modern-day preachers to shame. He refused to pat them on the back and tell them God loved them. Yes, he proclaimed that God did love, but first he told them to repent from the heart of their wrongs. God’s love is not what is in question. It is understood. God’s judgment is just that sure.

Joel then becomes the Pentecost prophet. We must remember that Joel is a prophet to Judah, and Judah would be the nation through which Christ would come. Where Joel uses the word “afterward” in 2:28, Peter uses the words “in the last days” (Acts 2:17). “Last days” is used in at least two different ways in the Scripture. Sometimes it refers to the end of the Jewish state that our Lord spoke of in the first thirty-five verses of Matthew 24. It is then used to refer to the Christian Dispensation. Hebrews 1:1-2 is a graphic demonstration of this. Christ lived during the last days of the Jewish state.

Joel lays the groundwork for all of the prophets in foretelling the beginning of the Lord’s church: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the

Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32). Revelation 22 says, whosoever will, let him come. A remnant would obey then. A remnant obeyed on the Day of Pentecost. A remnant is all that will be saved. The Lord said few would be saved.

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14). We are ever making decisions. No decision is greater than obeying God. However, it is not an automatic decision. It is a decision that must be pondered upon. Make the choice as Joshua proclaimed that he and his house would serve the Lord. They had made their choice to follow God instead of anyone or anything else.

There are multitudes of congregations that need to go to the valley of decision to make the right choice. So many have departed from the faith. So many have demonstrated denominational traits. They need to look at the end, at judgment. They need to see the One from Whom their hearts have turned and get in the valley of decision, and come out with the sword, and battle Satan and sin until death. Elders need to lead us to the valley of right thinking. Preachers need to go back to the fundamentals of the faith and teach with vigor God’s Word. Teach it without regret! Be unashamed and unafraid to stand beside mighty Peter, James, John, Paul, and many others in apostolic times. Please, please stop apologizing for our rich heritage of faithful preachers who have gone to their reward. We need more Hardemans, Lipscombs, and Harpers. Will we stand in the gap? Let us get in the valley of decision and make the right choices. Multitudes are in the valley of decision, but they are deciding to follow Satan. There’s a Great Day coming. Are you ready for that day to come?

CHAPTER 8

Introduction To The Book Of Amos

Jerry Moffitt

Introduction

THE BOOK IS NAMED after the prophet Amos. He lived in Tekoa, a hill-village in the wilderness of Judah about five miles southeast of Judah. Apart from the book, we know nothing about him. He seems to have had the classical work of a shepherd or raiser of sheep (Amos 1:1; 7:14-15). Part of the year, he was a dresser of sycamore trees. Harrison says, "Cultivators of this fig found it necessary to perform an incision on the fruit when it was about an inch in length, some three or four days before it was harvested."¹ All this points out that he was not one of a social or wealthy class. He could be plain in speech. However, Harrison writes, "The lyrical and dramatic heights to which Amos rose compare favorably with the finest efforts of Hosea or Isaiah, and far exceeded those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel."² He has a hard message and a hard, difficult task, so he is a plain, rustic spokesman.

Outline Of The Contents And The Message

Freeman has one of the best outlines of the book. It is helpful as it allows one to grasp the whole of the contents in almost a glance.³

Outline

I. General judgments against the nations including Judah and Israel (Amos 1-2).

A. Judgments upon surrounding nations (1:1-2:3).

1. Against Damascus (1:3-5).
2. Against Gaza (1:6-8).
3. Against Tyre (1:9-10).
4. Against Edom (1:11-12).
5. Against Ammon (1:13-15).
6. Against Moab (2:1-3).

B. Judgments upon Judah and Israel (2:4-16).

1. Against Judah (vv. 4-5).
2. Against Israel (vv. 6-16).

II. Specific judgments against Israel contained in three proclamations (chps. 3-6).

A. The sin of presumption (ch. 3).

1. The cause of Israel's judgment: rejection of their responsibilities (vv. 1-2, 9-10).
2. The prophet's authority to announce judgment (vv. 3-8).
3. The judgment described (vv. 11-15).

B. The sin of religious hypocrisy (ch. 4).

1. Their moral character described—social and moral decay (vv. 1-3).
2. Their religious character described—dead spiritually and vain ritual (vv. 4-5).
3. The futility of past judgments upon Israel (vv. 6-11).
4. Summons to final judgment: "prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (vv. 12-13).

C. The sin of moral and ethical corruption (chps. 5-6).

1. The prophet's lamentations over Israel (5:1-3).
2. A call to repentance (5:4-9, 14-15)
3. The cause of judgement—moral and ethical decay (5:10-13).

4. The announcement of judgment (5:16-6:14).
 - a. The lament of the people (5:16-17).
 - b. The first woe—the day of the Lord (5:18-27).
 - c. The second woe—destruction and captivity (6:1-14).
- III. Symbolic visions of the coming judgment (7:1-9:10).
 - A. First vision—the plague of locust (7:1-3).
 - B. Second vision—the devouring fire (7:4-6).
 - C. Third vision—the plumbline (7:7-9).
 - D. Historical parenthesis (7:10-17).
 - E. Fourth vision—the basket of summer fruit (ch. 8).
 - F. Fifth vision—the altar (9:1-10).
- IV. The promise of Messianic blessing (9:11-15).
 - A. The Messianic Kingdom (vv. 11-13).
 - B. The restoration of Israel (vv. 14-15).

Historical Background

He was called by the Lord to be a prophet so that he could rebuke the sins of the ten tribes and their decline into extravagance. It was during the reigns of Uzziah in the south and Jeroboam II in the north. Keil thinks it was during the latter half of the reign of Jeroboam II and not earlier than his 27th year.⁴ He adds:

At this time the kingdom of Israel, under Jeroboam, had attained its greatest extent; and worldly power, luxury, and debauchery had misled the people into careless security (3:15; 6:1, 4), so that unrighteousness prevailed (2:6ff, 3:9ff, 4:1; 5:7, 10ff), and hurried on the ruin of the kingdom.⁵

When Assyria, forty years earlier than Amos, crushed Syria, it allowed Jeroboam II to extend Israel's boundaries. The tranquility allowed Israel to build up a lucrative trade with its neighbors. But Thompson says:

Unfortunately the wealth that came to Samaria was not evenly distributed among the people. It remained in the hands of merchant princes, who spent their new-found riches on improving their living conditions.⁶

So they started off with tranquility, and they soon lapsed into materialism. Amos' message is to warn them of it, that luxury is leading them away from morality. The poor are oppressed. The judiciary can be bought; bribery is rampant. Harrison adds: "the gap between rich and poor became ominously wide. Within a few short years the poor had been reduced to the level of servitude."⁷

The prophet starts off with severe rebukes regarding the nations around Israel, even Judah. This was the kind of preaching they liked. They may have thought that there was more to this old, rustic prophet than they had first sensed. In quick succession he levels the transgressions of the nations right at them: those of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah. At this point the rich of the northern kingdom might have really been getting into it. But suddenly, with even more bluntness, he rebukes and is found prophesying against Israel. Now they wish him to go. A few of their sins might be listed as follows: "they have sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes" (2:6). They "abhor him that speaks uprightly" (5:10). Amos gives special attention to their luxury, their beds of ivory, their idle songs, and bowls of wine (6:4-6). Amos hurt them dreadfully. But it is soon evident he was the physician they needed, and only his strong medicine could help. Paul said, "these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6). He added, "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (10:11). I know of no better book on

which to preach for our generation. Peace, luxury, ease, frolic, and games are not just in the world but now quite full and prominent in the Lord's church.

Date

As is often the case, there is a variety of supposed dates, yet none is drastically apart from the others. We have noted that Amos said he prophesied in the reigns of Azariah (Uzziah) and Jeroboam II. Since Jotham, due to Uzziah's leprosy, acted as co-regent after 750 B.C., **The Eerdman's Bible Dictionary**⁸ places the date between 760 and 750 B.C. Keil, in his commentary, and not as liberal in his views, points out that there were twenty-six years which overlapped the two kings Uzziah and Jeroboam II between 810 and 783 B.C. So he labored about the same time as Hosea. In chapter one, verse one, Amos says it was two years before the earthquake. But there were many earthquakes, and the one Josephus singles out may not be the correct one. Too, Keil adds:

As Amos has not given the date of the earthquakes, his evident intention was not to fix the time when his ministry commenced, or when his book was composed, but simply to point to the internal connection between this event and his own prophetic mission.⁹

It was a harbinger of the judgment which was to soon come.

Harrison points out that, since the leprosy of Uzziah was late in the reign, and necessitated a co-regent late in the reign, the ministry of Amos should be about 750 B.C. Others differ by a year or two, but the latest date Harrison found was by N. H. Snaith in **Mercy and Sacrifice**, page twelve. Regardless, Harrison says, "The prophecy is of very great value in that it forms the chief source of information relating to the internal conditions in the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II."¹⁰

Problems

What we call problems are not problems for us; that is simply the name higher criticism gives them. There are always some who seem to have weak views of inspiration. They imagine they see mysterious original works which the prophetic books are copied from. They see the hand of redactors and editors everywhere. Such critics believe that these oracles and prophecies were transmitted orally for a long period of time until one or more editors put them together and wrote them out. It is the experience of this writer that their views are formed not so much from the evidence as from a prior prejudice against anything supernatural, even supernaturalism regarding the inspiration of the Bible. Regarding the above, Harrison notes Smart (**Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible**, I, p. 118) has showed that “the remarkable sound condition of the Hebrew text lends support to the view that either Amos or an amanuensis set down the oracles in writing.”¹¹

Some suggest that the visions were formed as a separate document preceding the mission to Israel. It is felt that oracles in chapters one to six were collected at the close of the northern ministry. They further suppose (and this helps them avoid supernatural inspiration) that both documents were subsequently united in exilic days with editorial additions. Their best evidence is where one section has “the words of Amos” and the other has “the vision of Amos which he saw.” Harrison makes a proper point and obvious alternative which should be even more plausible:

Any theory that makes something approaching a hard and fast division between oracles and vision in Amos rests necessarily upon extremely fragile foundations, since there is no evidence that such division, if indeed it ever existed, did not originate with the prophet himself.¹²

Enough. A little bit of such anti-supernatural theorizing goes a long way. May God be praised that he has given us such a bold little book.

Endnotes

1 Roland K. Harrison, **Introduction to the Old Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 883.

2 Ibid, p. 892.

3 Hobart E. Freeman, **An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), pp. 189-190.

4 C. F. Keil, **Introduction to the Old Testament**, Volume 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 385.

5 Ibid.

6 J. G. S. S. Tompson, "Amos, Book of," **The New Bible Dictionary**, 1st ed.

7 Harrison, p. 885.

8 Allen C. Myers, "Amos, Book of," **Eerdmans' Bible Dictionary**, Revised ed.

9 C. F. Keil and F. Dellitzsch, **Commentary on the Old Testament**, Volume 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 234.

10 Harrison, p. 884. **Amos--An Introduction**, p. 8.

11 Ibid, p. 890.

12 Ibid, p. 891.

CHAPTER 9

Commentary On The Book Of Amos

Charles R. Williams

Introduction

THE AUTHOR OF THE entire prophecy was Amos himself.¹ Amos was a prophet of Judah, but the main thrust of his message is directed to Israel. However, he does not restrict himself to Israel but also prophesies against Judah and surrounding nations. He lived in or near Tekoa, a town about twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

He was not educated in the schools of the prophets but was called of God to work as a prophet during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (785-746 B.C.).² There are additional references to the earthquake in Zechariah 14:5 and Josephus (*Antiquities* 9, 10:4). The earthquake was a harbinger of the judgment of God against Judah, the surrounding nations, and Israel.³

Amos was taken from his work as a shepherd and a gatherer of sycamore trees to prophesy against a world steeped in idolatry and immorality. The people were lying on their “beds of ivory” and “at ease in Zion” with a false sense of security. Amos tells them that their “strongholds” will be torn down, many will perish, and others will be carried into captivity. They have rejected God and broken His laws. Broken law demands paying of a penalty, or the

law will be despised. They must pay the penalty! Paul, many years later, wrote: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:8). So shall it ever be!

Outline

1:1: Author, occupation of the author, being called of God to prophesy, and the time of his prophecy.

1:2-2:3: God’s judgment and impending punishments against the surrounding nations of Judah and Israel.

2:4-16: God’s judgments and warnings against Judah and Israel.

3:1-6:9: Three arguments and warnings against Israel.

7:1-9:10: Revelations through visions concerning God’s judgments and warnings to Israel.

9:11-15: Restoration and the Messianic Kingdom.

Comments

1:1: Amos identifies the words of his prophecy as being his. However, five times in the first chapter he uses the expression, “Thus saith the Lord.” Thus the message originated with God. Amos was the inspired spokesman. God spoke through Amos. The time of his work as a prophet was during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. For comments on the earthquake, see the introduction. The Jeroboam referred to was Jeroboam II.

1:2: Amos said, “The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem.” This is an example of Hebrew parallelism. Zion is to be understood as Jerusalem. The term “roar” has been likened to the roar of a lion, but it seems more natural in this context to think of it as a storm of God’s judgment sweeping across the neighboring nations (and Judah) and passing on to engulf and destroy

Israel. Amos links his prophecy to that of Joel by quoting the first part of Joel 3:16: “The habitations of the shepherds shall mourn (personification, CW) and the top of Carmel shall wither.” Hailey observes, “The thunder of his voice would be as the blast of a furnace.”⁴ Thus, in a very graphic, startling way, Amos, a simple shepherd prophet, a gatherer of sycamore fruit, announces the theme of his prophetic message from the Lord. Amos sets a pattern worthy of emulation by every faithful Gospel preacher today. In the language of the apostle Peter, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). The seeming harshness of the message of Amos is softened by the love of God for Israel, as evidenced by the repeated appeals for Israel to repent. It is not God’s will that any should perish, but it is also the Lord’s message: “Except ye repent ye shall likewise perish” (2 Pet. 3:9; Luke 13:3). The Lord’s Gospel message for today has facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, promises to be enjoyed, and warnings to be heeded. For one to fail to teach all of these is to teach a mutilated Gospel!

1:3-2:5: Amos denounces the sins of Israel’s neighbors and indicates that they will suffer punishment from God for their sins. Even Judah and Israel, the Lord’s covenant people, must face God’s wrath! They have been given time to repent: “This is the fundamental thought of the writing of Amos, who was called by the Lord to preach this truth to the nation of Israel.”⁵ Amos was sent from his home in Tekoa to prophesy in Bethel, located in the territory of Israel. It is tragic that Israel could not profit from the judgments visited on her neighbors and return from her apostasy from God. It is still true that we find it difficult to profit from the mistakes of others (Rom. 15:4). In speaking of Judah’s following Israel down the path of apostasy, Ezekiel said, “As is the mother, so is the daughter”

(Ezek. 16:44). This proverb is not always true if literally applied, but it was a graphic way of stating the case for Judah!

Chapter one and verse three marks the beginning of God's judgments upon six neighbor nations that occupied territory originally given to Judah and Israel. Three of these nations—Edom, Ammon, and Moab—were related to Judah and Israel. Edom was descended from Esau, brother of Jacob (Israel), and Ammon and Moab were descendants of Lot, nephew of Abraham (Gen.12). The six nations are not listed in geographical order. Each judgment is prefaced by "Thus saith the Lord." God has pronounced condemnation on these nations. Amos is simply God's "mouthpiece." God must be shown to be a righteous God. The nations are to be punished because of their transgressions. These prophecies obviously were designed for the attention of Judah and Israel. They were designed also to show that God would not tolerate sin. They, too, would be called to face the wrath of God's judgments.

The expression, "for three transgressions...and for four" is a peculiar expression that has been explained in various ways. The combination of three and four suggests the long suffering of God. Not for three transgressions but for four are they to face Jehovah's wrath. It also seems obvious that the three and four, a total of seven, is not without signification. Bible students usually regard seven as a whole or complete number. God's patience has been tried to the limit.

Damascus has been guilty of inhuman cruelty to Gilead for threshing the people with instruments of iron and now must face the consequences of their actions. A fire of destruction will be brought upon the ruling house of Damascus, capital of Syria, and the bar (bolt) of their protection will be broken and they will be carried into

captivity unto Kir (a walled place). Nothing is known of Aven or Eden. They may have been places of idolatry or immorality.

Gaza will be punished for being involved in slavery: “Gaza was one of the five capitals of the Philistines which had taken the most active part in handing over the Israelite prisoners to the Edomites.”⁶ The Edomites were archenemies of the Israelites. Their name became a synonym for sin. Herod was one of the remnants of the Edomites in New Testament days. A fire of destruction would destroy the wall (protection) of Damascus, and the inhabitants of Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron (cities of Philistia) would be destroyed.

Tyrus was to be punished for “delivering up” (selling) slaves to Edom and not remembering the “brotherly covenant” Solomon and David had made with Tyrus (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:15). No king of Judah or Israel had made war on Tyrus. A fire of destruction would be sent upon Tyrus which would destroy the palaces.

Punishment was to be visited upon Edom for its hatred of Israel and its acts of violence, implacable wrath, and lack of pity. The statement in Romans 9:13, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated,” does not refer to the individuals but to their descendants. God had cherished the descendants of Jacob (Jews), but the descendants of Esau had been rejected of God for their extreme wickedness. A fire was to be sent on Edom which would destroy Bozrah (an important city).

Ammon (Ammonites—descendants of Lot) was to be punished for “ripping up” pregnant women to enlarge their border by taking back land that had been taken from them by Sihon, king of the Amorites. Their capital was to be burned and their king and princes would become captives.

The charge against Moab (descendants of Lot by his daughter) was that “he burned the bones of the king of

Edom into lime.” No record of this has been preserved in the historical records, but a comparison can be made with 2 Kings 23:16. For the desecration of the dead, a fire (of war) would be sent that would consume the palaces and Moab would be destroyed. The sounding of the trumpet is the signal for attack. Whether the term “judge” is used for variety or whether Moab had a king at this time is uncertain.

The crimes charged against five of the nations were crimes committed against God’s covenant people. The crimes of the Moabites were against the king of Edom. The prophecies of Amos against these nations were fulfilled by the Chaldeans. These nations were conquered, and the inhabitants were carried into captivity.

In the next section Amos will begin his prophecies against Judah. The wrath of God is to be felt by Judah. This sets the stage for the prophecies against Israel, which is the principal object of the work of Amos.

2:4-5: The charges against Judah were despising God’s law, failure to keep the commandments, and turning to idolatry (lies). Judah had followed Israel in accepting idolatry and the immorality so closely associated with it.

2:6-16: The rest of the chapter is concerned with the sins of Israel. In spite of their wealth and power, they too must account to God for their sins. It is God’s law that every seed will produce after its own kind. This principle applies not only in the material world but also in the spiritual. The admonition of the apostle to the Galatians (Gal. 6:7-8), written many years later, applies to all mankind in every age.

The sins of Israel are enumerated. They were guilty of unjust treatment of the poor. They sold the righteous into slavery. They trampled the poor and meek into the dust. They were guilty of gross immorality and had profaned the holy name of God in violating the Law of

God stated in Leviticus 20:3. They desecrated the sanctuary of Jehovah by drinking the wine of the condemned and by lying on clothes that had been pawned (Exod. 22:25; Deut. 24:12-13).

Amos reminds them of their ingratitude for the temporal blessings that God had bestowed upon them. He had given them deliverance from Egypt. He destroyed the Amorites (Canaanites) before them, thus providing them protection from their enemies. He had bestowed spiritual blessings by the revelation of His will. He had provided them an example of holiness by the Nazarites (Num. 6) Amos seeks to stir their consciences by God's penetrating question, "Is it not thus, O ye children of Israel?" The question demands an affirmative answer.

In verses 12-16, Amos continues to show their lack of gratitude for God's blessings and their despising of God's Law. Such treatment on their part demands punishment. God gave them the Nazarites as an example of holiness; they gave them wine. God gave them the prophets for instruction, and they commanded them not to prophesy. Their punishment is therefore sure!

God said, "Behold I will press you in your place as a cart presses that is full of sheaves" (ASV). Amos continues to the end of the chapter to declare that there will be no escape for the swift, the strong, the mighty, the courageous.

3:1-8: Israel had enjoyed a special relationship with God. Israel and Judah (the whole family) had been chosen of God and had received many blessings. But God's grace does not give a license to sin! Broken law demands the payment of a penalty. Punishment must come. They have been exalted above other nations. Now they are to be judged of God for their transgressions.

Amos defends his right to deliver God's message: "Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you."

It is God's Word, not the word of Amos. He presents a series of questions to make his case.

Can two, God and Amos, walk together except they be agreed? Amos can do nothing that is not in agreement with God and still walk with Him. Although, in the context, "two" refers to God and Amos, it is equally true that Israel (the whole family) must be in agreement with God to walk with Him. They have not been walking with God! Neither nations nor individuals can walk with God without being in agreement with Him. The lion (God) has his prey (Israel) in sight and is about to spring (destroy Israel): "Can a bird fall into a snare upon the earth where no gin (trap, CW) is for him?" Her sins will cause her destruction: "Shall a trumpet be blown?" The trumpet, a signal for war, is to warn and waken Israel to their danger of God's judgment upon them, and they should take action (repent). The "evil" is the judgment that results from their transgressions. The "secret" is God's judgment upon them now revealed by Amos. They have been warned: "The lion has roared." The sound of God's judgment should lead them to repentance. God has spoken; Amos, His prophet, can but deliver the message. God's message of warning and salvation has been delivered to man today through the Gospel. (Rom. 1:16). Can the faithful preacher do other than deliver that message without addition or subtraction to a lost and dying world? Amos had no right to change God's message, nor does man today have any such right (Rev. 22:18ff).

3:9-15: Judgment is to be delivered upon the wealthy, ruling class. Ashdod and Egypt are called as witnesses. The altars of Bethel, their idolatrous worship in which they have confidence, will be destroyed.

In verses 9-10, Jehovah orders the prophet to call the inhabitants of Ashdod and Egypt to witness the abominations and violence of Samaria, the capital of the

northern kingdom, that they may witness against Israel because they do not do right.

In verses 11-12, God is the speaker. He addresses Samaria. Samaria is to be devastated. As a shepherd is able to rescue a small part of a sheep from a lion, so only a fraction of Samaria will be spared of those who are in careless ease and luxury.

In the final verses of this chapter, the heathen are called to witness the judgment to be visited on Bethel. Their altars of idolatrous worship will be destroyed. Their luxury and extravagant way of living, while others were poverty-stricken, would end. The Word of God is a constant witness here and elsewhere that “pride goeth before a fall.” The judgment upon these nations of antiquity should be a warning to this present generation of moral bankruptcy and atheism, characterized by ungodly and unrighteous living, that they will some day face the wrath of God’s judgment.

4:1-3: This chapter further describes Israel’s lack of repentance and the consequences of her actions. “Kine of Bashan” represents the voluptuous, wanton women, wives of the rich rulers who requested their lords to furnish them the means of debauchery. They oppress the poor and crush the needy. They will be torn from their profligate lives as fish caught in a net and will be carried into captivity.

4:4-5: Jehovah speaks in irony as He urges them to multiply their transgressions as they offer their worthless, idolatrous worship. Their pleasure will be short-lived. The identity of Harmon, where they will be taken, is unknown.

4:6-13: Amos mentions five chastisements that have been sent upon Israel, but they have not repented. These chastisements are as follows: lack of food; rain has been withheld, which caused loss of harvest and a lack of water; they have been smitten with blasting; their corn has turned yellow; their fruit has been destroyed by locusts. There is

an excellent article in the May, 1989 issue of **Reader's Digest** which helps to understand the devastation caused by locusts in Bible lands. Amos also said that pestilence had been sent upon them. Their young men had been slain, and their horses had been taken. Their cities had been overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah, and they had been plucked from the fire.

"Therefore" in verse twelve looks back to punishment received and forward to punishment yet to be inflicted upon them. The nature of the future punishment is not given. Perhaps this is because their anticipation of the unknown is designed to urge them to "prepare to meet their God."

The final verse of this chapter emphasizes the fact that it is an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Lord God of hosts they must meet. So must all of us prepare to meet this God in judgment.

5:1-6:14: Chapters five and six stress the coming judgment that will result in the complete overthrow of Israel. The judgment can be averted in no other way than by a complete return to God. Once more the demands of God are to be set before them. The demands in these two chapters may be easily marked by five expressions: "Seek ye me and live" (5:4); "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (5:6); "Seek good and not evil, that ye may live" (5:14); "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord" (5:18); "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (6:1). They are designed to destroy the false foundation in which these sinners trust.

5:1-6: Amos urges them to hear his lamentation over Israel. Israel is addressed as a fallen virgin. She has been guilty of spiritual adultery in turning from God to idols. She has lost her purity! She has refused Jehovah, and there is none other to whom she can go. Many years later Peter said, "Lord to whom can we go?" The answer was, "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Amos said of Israel, "There is none to raise her up."

Only ten percent will escape the judgment to come on Israel. Their only hope is in seeking the Lord that they might live. Neither Bethel nor Gilgal, centers of idolatrous worship, can avail. Both are to be destroyed! If they fail to seek the Lord, fire will break out in the house of Joseph (father of Ephraim, the most powerful tribe of the ten). Joseph here stands for Israel. Bethel will not be able to quench the fire.

5:7-12: In these verses Israel is charged with turning justice into wormwood (a bitter plant)—here indicating bitter wrong, rejecting righteousness, hating reproof, oppressing the poor, afflicting the just, taking bribes, and turning aside (denying) the poor from their righteous judgment in the gates. They are urged to seek God, who made the constellations and has power over death and the elements. If they fail to do so, they will lose what they have taken from the poor and their houses and the fruit of their vineyards. God knew their many transgressions.

5:13-17: Since talking is useless, Amos again urges them to seek good and not evil, to hate evil and love good, and perhaps God will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. To those who refuse, there will be wailing in the streets and highways.

5:18-27: In this section, woe is pronounced upon those who desire the day of the Lord, thinking that God will again save them from the heathen nations and again exalt them. The day of the Lord will not be light but darkness. Although they are God's covenant people, they have broken the covenant and God will regard them not (Jer. 31:31ff). To flee from a lion and meet a bear or even to lean on a wall and be bitten by a serpent is compared to their efforts to escape judgment.

They will not prevail! God hates their feast days, sacrifices, their peace offerings, and their vain worship in

their unwillingness to repent. Israel has worshiped Moloch and Chiun (idols); therefore, they will go into captivity beyond Damascus.

6:1-6: A second woe is pronounced against those who were at ease in Zion and trust in the mountain of Samaria. Amos addresses the careless heads of the nations reveling in their riches and unaware of the Divine judgment to fall upon them. They were at ease in Zion and trusting in the vain, idolatrous worship of Samaria. They were told to look to Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. Had they been more blessed than Judah and Israel? Were they safer than they were? They were to fall. Can Israel expect to prevail? Israel was guilty of ingratitude, rebellion, violence, idolatrous revelry, and debauchery. They sang “idle songs” in their sacrilegious worship and cared nothing for the afflicted. They “invent to themselves instruments of music, like David.” Some have used Amos 6:5 as an argument against the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship, and some have used the passage in an effort to justify its use. But, even if it could be established that God did authorize instrumental music in Old Testament worship, the proof would be lacking for its use in Christian worship! For its acceptability to God, authority must be found within the framework of New Testament authority (Col. 3:17). Homer Hailey had this to say in reference to Amos 6:5:

The inventing of “instruments of music” did not refer to the instruments used in worship; nor can this passage be used as an argument against the use of such instruments in worship today as is done by Adam Clarke. They invented musical instruments to be used in the sordid revelry and feasts and banquets of that day.⁷

I might add that to appeal to Amos 6:5 or Revelation 14:2 in an effort to justify the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship is to expose

the weakness of the effort. Why not give a passage authorizing its use in Christian worship? It cannot be done! If it could be shown that instrumental music was authorized in Jewish worship or that mechanical instruments of music would be used in heaven, this would not authorize its use in Christian worship.

6:7-14: In these verses is the announcement of punishment for those described in the preceding verses. They will go into captivity, and they will be stripped from their revelry. God swears by Himself that He abhors the pride of Jacob (Judah and Israel), and destruction will come upon them by sword, famine, or captivity. The two similes in verse twelve demand a negative answer. The rocks must be removed, or both horse and oxen will be endangered. So must the transgressions of Israel be removed for them to escape danger. But they have refused the warnings of Amos. Their own strength does not exist. God will raise up a nation against Israel and they will be afflicted.

7:1-9: This section contains three visions of Amos: of locusts, of fire, and of a plumbline. These visions refer to three punitive judgments of God against Israel. In verses one through three, God showed Amos a vision of locusts that destroyed the grass. The king is God. The mowing of the grass points to judgment already sent on Israel. After the second mowing, other judgments are indicated. Amos intercedes, and a full end was not made. The fire was the fire of God's wrath. In verses seven through nine, the third vision was of God standing with a plumbline in His hand. The plumbline was to measure Israel's spiritual condition. The "wall" of God's protection would no longer spare Israel. The "high places" of idolatrous worship would be torn down, and Jeroboam would face the sword.

7:10-17: In verses 10-17, the account of the visions is interrupted to show the opposition of Amaziah to Amos. Amaziah, priest of Bethel, sent a message to king Jeroboam

saying that Amos had conspired against him and had said that he would die by the sword and that Israel would be led into captivity. Amaziah told Amos to go back to Judah and eat bread. He implied that Amos was preaching for support he was not entitled to. He had no right to prophesy at Bethel because it was the king's sanctuary (of the golden calf) and was a royal house. Amos replied that he was not a prophet or a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. Jehovah took him from his flock and gave him a message to Israel! No higher authority could be claimed for his ministry. No preacher today should be afraid or ashamed to preach God's message for the world regardless of opposition or persecution (Rom. 1:16). Amos was forbidden to prophesy but, like Peter, he believed he should "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Amos said, "Thus saith the Lord." Amaziah's wife would be unfaithful to him as he had been unfaithful to the Lord. His sons and daughters would fall by the sword. He would die, and Israel would go into captivity.

8:1-3: The main thrust of this chapter is that Israel is ripe for judgment. In verses 1-3, Amos saw a basket of summer fruit. It is not fruit still on the vine but is in the basket—gathered! This is similar to a statement of Jeremiah: "The harvest is past, summer is ended and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). The summer fruit was the last to be gathered. The appeal to Israel has not prevailed. God will no longer spare them. Dead bodies will be everywhere. The word "silence" is translated by Keil as "**hush**": "Hush! is not a sign of gloomy despair, but an admonition to bow beneath the overwhelming severity of the judgment of God."⁸

8:4-10: In verses 4-10, the last admonition to the heartless rich is given. They longed for the holy days and the Sabbath days to be past that they might carry on their fraudulent business of robbing the poor to feed their greed:

Any time that people get so steeped in materialism that they are willing to give God a secondary place in their lives, they can look forward to the ultimate judgment that must be brought upon them.⁹

God swears by the pride (Himself) of Jacob (father of the Israelites) that He would not forget their sins. God's judgment upon them is described in graphic language. The disturbance caused by the Lord's judgment on them is compared to the rising and falling of the annual overflow of the banks of the river. The joy of the inhabitants will be turned into mourning and lamentations. Sackcloth (loss of security) will be on their heads and baldness will be on every head (cf. Isa. 3:24). They will sorrow as one who has lost a son.

8:11-14: In verses 11-14, God says they will be sent a famine of the Word of God they have rejected. They will seek it too late and will not be able to find it. The young men and virgins, the strength of the nation, shall swoon. Those who swear by the sin (golden calf) of Samaria or think the calf at Dan or the way to worship at Beersheba will save them are deceived. They shall fall, never to rise again. They had forsaken God, the very source of life! So will everyone fail today who turns from God and the crucified Christ, the only source of life.

9:1: The interpretation of the final vision and the final chapter of the book is dependent on the identity of the altar seen by Amos. It seems that it is the altar in Jerusalem rather than the altar at Bethel. It is not Israel alone that is judged but also Judah. God is concerned with the nation as a whole. A remnant of the house of Jacob is to be preserved:

So long as the Lord continued to send prophets to the ten tribes, so long did they pass as still forming part of the people of God, and so also

was the temple at Jerusalem the divinely (sic) appointed sanctuary and the throne of Jehovah, from which both blessings and punishment issued for them.¹⁰

9:2-4: There can be no escape. If they dig to Sheol or if they ascend to heaven, they will be brought down. Though they climb to the top of Carmel or go down in the sea, they cannot escape the vengeance of God.

9:5-6: The God of heaven, the Omnipotent One, will search them out.

9:7-10: The fact that they are chosen of God will not cause them to escape the wrath of Jehovah. They had forfeited their right to security by forsaking God and have become as the Ethiopians, the Philistines, and the Syrians to God. He had brought these nations from their former places, but this provided no security for them. Jehovah would destroy the “sinful” kingdom, but a remnant of Jacob would be preserved. Israel will be shaken as in a sieve. The chaff, the evil, will be destroyed and fall to the ground, but the good will be preserved. All the sinners will “die by the sword” who say, “the evil will not overtake us.”

9:11-15: In these final verses the prophet looks from the destruction of the material kingdom to the reign of the Messiah. In this section a ray of hope is given to the remnant that shall be preserved. However, there is in these verses, or anywhere else in the Bible, nothing to support the false doctrine of premillennialism! It is the spiritual kingdom, the church, over which Christ will reign that is referred to in these final verses (Acts 2; Dan. 2; Isa. 2; Acts 15:14-18). Verses 13-14 refer to the spiritual blessings that will be bestowed on God’s New Covenant people (Eph.1:3).

The passage is metaphorical, the fulfillment of which is not to be looked for literally but spiritually. I close my comments on this great message of God, through His

prophet Amos, with a quotation from the pen of Charles Pledge in reference to verses 13-15 of this final chapter of the book of Amos:

These verses are filled with figures of speech indicating the many blessings that are available only in this tabernacle of David, the church of the Son of God. To obtain the blessings one must be in the realm where God bestows them.¹¹

Endnotes

1 Edward J. Young, **An Introduction to the Old Testament**.

2 Jack P. Lewis, **The Minor Prophets**, p. 16.

3 Keil and Delitzsch, **Minor Prophets**, p. 234.

4 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, p. 91.

5 Keil and Delitzsch, p. 238.

6 Ibid, p. 245.

7 Hailey, p. 114.

8 Keil, p. 314.

9 Charles Pledge, **Getting Acquainted with the Old Testament**, Vol. 2, p. 230.

10 Keil, p. 321.

11 Pledge, p. 231.

CHAPTER 10

Great Lessons From The Book Of Amos

Michael Gifford

Introduction

LIKE EACH OF THE other books of the Bible, the book of Amos is a brimming mine of spiritual treasures. Unearthing the countless gems of truth therein is a rewarding task which this chapter can only begin to accomplish. May every reader of these words apply himself to a more detailed study of the “major” message of this “minor” prophet.

This treatise on Amos’ book is divided into three parts. First, we will deal with the **person** who delivered God’s Word. Next, we will consider the **problem** which was addressed. Finally, we will conduct a brief overview of the **prophecy** which Amos delivered by Divine inspiration.

The Person

By human estimation, Amos was not the man to go and preach a sermon to as mighty a nation as Israel. He was a farmer, a herdsman (Amos 1:1), and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (7:14). He had no pedigree among prophets, no heritage of preachers. He was of the lowest class of people and, to top it all off, not even a citizen of the northern kingdom.

Centuries earlier, God had told Samuel: “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward

appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). The Almighty continued to view men in this manner in the days of Amos. He was not searching for a man of letters. He was not looking for an elocutionist. He did not establish education or wealth or power as qualifications for the position He desired to fill. These are traits which man insists are marks of greatness, and, while a person can have all of these and still be great, true greatness is determined by those characteristics which God deems of the highest value—namely faith, humility, and a willingness to surrender oneself to the Divine will. Amos possessed these traits, plus the quality of courage, and this is why he was appointed to deliver the message to Israel.

The Problem

Israel, in the days of Amos (mid-eighth century B.C.), was at a peak of prosperity. Lands which had been taken away were regained (2 Kings 14:23-28). Material wealth abounded. God had blessed them richly with worldly goods; yet, as happens even with men and women today, Israel changed their prosperity from a gift **from** God into a god itself. They “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). They became lovers of pleasure, materialistic idolaters who threw their money away on things (Amos 3:15) and gave the praise to their idols for their riches (5:26).

Israel’s wealth led to Israel’s indolence. The rich were compared to fat cows (4:1-3). They lay around on couches, drank wine, ate fine food, and enjoyed entertainment (6:4-5).

Israel’s wealth also led to greed. A certain covetous man was asked, “How much money is enough?” To this he replied, “One dollar more than I have.” That man could have lived in eighth-century Israel. Though the wealthy dwelt in “ivory houses” (3:15) and “houses of hewn stone”

(5:11) and though they had “pleasant vineyards” (5:11), they wanted more. Consequently, they cheated one another, skimping on measurements of inferior products which they sold at inflated prices (8:5-6).

The rich in Israel would do anything for money, going even so far as to bilk it from a brother who had nothing more to give than the coat on his back (2:8). To them, a man’s value was equal to what they could get out of him, whether it was silver or a pair of shoes or the dust on his head (2:6-7).

Justice became a farce in the land as favorable judgments were given not to the innocent, but to the rich (5:12). A form of religion existed, but it was only a form. Jehovah was worshiped as only another god among many (5:21-26). The sabbath day was no longer counted as a holy day but as an intrusion upon life’s greatest joy as they saw it—making money (8:5).

These sins led Israel away from God. Their will was personal pleasure while His will was righteousness. The two no longer agreed and thus could no longer walk together (3:3). But Israel’s eyes were closed to this fact. They were drowning in their ease and refused to see it (6:1). The Lord’s chastisements could not get them to see their horrible condition (4:6-11). The prophets could not convince them: “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (5:10). Israel tried to corrupt the righteous (2:12) and even sought to drive them out of the land (7:10-13). No one is so blind as he who will not see. Israel refused to be “grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (6:6).

The Prophecy

Up came Amos from the southern kingdom, from his hometown of Tekoa. He was not a pandering prophet like many of those in Israel who sought only to tickle the ears

of their benefactors. He was not swayed by threats but instead stood up to them, fighting off the fiery darts of Satan with the shield of faith while attacking the error in the land with the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:16-17).

How earnestly and urgently did Amos plead with Israel! In his funeral dirge of chapter five, he begged repeatedly for the people to “seek the Lord.” In Amos 5:15, he pleaded: “Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.” In two of the visions he had (7:1-6), he interceded for the people, confessing to God their weakness and smallness.

Surrounding the pleas were the warnings. As Israel had forsaken God, so also would God forsake Israel. The mightiest among them would fall (2:13-16). Their precious lands and houses would be taken away (5:11). Their revelry at banquets would cease (6:7-8). Their beloved idols and altars would come crashing to the ground (9:1). And there would be no escape (5:18-19; 9:2-4).

In short, the prophecy to Israel is summed up in one statement: “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, **prepare to meet thy God, O Israel**” (4:12, emp. mine, MG).

The vision of the plumbline (7:7-10) and the vision of the basket of summer fruit (8:1-3) stand out as memorable lessons, as through them God taught that He had measured the actions of the people and found Israel ripe for destruction. Another frequently quoted portion of the book is the beautiful plea, “But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” (5:24). Still another oft-repeated statement is that found in Amos 6:1: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.” That these and many other passages in the book of Amos are still referred to is a tribute to the power and longevity of God’s Word.

This section closes with just a brief note concerning the last five verses of the prophecy. This section has been abused by millennialists in order to support their doctrine that the nation of Israel will one day be restored to its land.

The world's best Bible commentary is the Bible itself. When inspiration explains an inspired passage, that explanation is one hundred percent correct, no ifs, ands, or buts.

Allowing the Bible to comment on itself, we permit Acts 15:13ff to interpret the meaning of Amos' prophecy in the end of his book. James, there speaking, does not say that the prophecy has anything to do with the reinstatement of Israel to its land. Instead, he says it has to do with the bringing in of the Gentiles, the making of a people who once were not a people, the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. This bringing in of the Gentiles has been done (Acts 10; 11:1-18; Ephesians 2:11ff; et al.). Amos' prophecy has been fulfilled and has no future fulfillment. For those satisfied with a "Thus saith the Lord," this settles once and for all what Amos 9:11-15 means.

Conclusion

The Word of God is compared to a mirror (Jas. 1:25). So often we are able to see ourselves reflected in the lives of the individuals of whom we read in the Bible.

Who can question that the book of Amos could have been written only yesterday and still found meaning and application in our society? Materialism, idolatry, injustice, indolence—these are still plaguing not only society but the Lord's church as well.

Have we allowed the pursuit of the almighty dollar to replace our walk with the Almighty God? Have we become so at ease with our spiritual condition that we are blinded to the dangers of being lukewarm Christians

(Rev. 3:16)? Do we no longer wish to hear rebukes and upright speaking of the truth, desiring instead to be stroked by nothing but words of comfort? Are Gospel preachers mere professionals who get paid to preach what the people want?

Think about the previous paragraph. Each question is rooted in the words of Amos and, even though his words were written thousands of years ago, they are so accurate a description of our condition today that it is frightening.

God pleads with us even as He did with Israel: “Seek ye me, and ye shall live.” Christian, get out of your easy chair. Put down the remote control. Fall on your knees and pray. Open your Bible and study. Stand on your feet and walk with the Lord, working, working, working daily in His kingdom. Or else allow Satan to corrupt your heart and mind and soul and lie on your bed of ease while the lost go to hell and the devil wreaks havoc in the body of Christ. And, if this latter path you tread, take a moment out from your worldliness to strike up your courage, make ready your defense, and “prepare to meet thy God” because He is coming to judge you (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 5:1ff; 2 Thess. 1:7-9) and there will be no escape.

CHAPTER 11

Introduction To The Book Of Obadiah

Thomas F. Eaves, Sr.

Introduction

OBADIAH, WITH ITS TWENTY-ONE verses, has the distinction of being the shortest book in the Old Testament. The book is not quoted in the New Testament, although some see verse twenty-one reflected in Revelation 11:15. The twenty-one verses of Obadiah consist of a vision given by God concerning Edom, and is divided into two natural divisions.

- I. The destruction of Edom announced (Obad. 1-16).
 - A. Prophecy of Edom's punishment (vv. 1-9).
 - B. The guilt which brought about the punishment (vv. 10-14).
 - C. The general law of retribution upon the heathen (vv. 15-16).
- II. Prophecies of the restoration of Israel (vv. 17-21).
 - A. An overall theme of Obadiah is reaping what you have sown. Three valuable lessons from the book of Obadiah are:
 - 1. The prophet's warning against ridicule (v. 12).
Ridicule springs from pride.
 - 2. His doctrine of strict retribution (vv. 10, 15).
Obadiah taught with special emphasis the indestructible character of eternal justice.

3. His sure hope of Israel's coming "Golden Age."
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions
(v. 17): "And saviours shall come up on mount Zion
to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom
shall be Jehovah's" (v. 21).¹

The Author Of The Book

The author of the book of Obadiah is Jehovah God. As to the penman of the book, we can know one thing for certain: his name was Obadiah. Unlike Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1-4), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1-3), Hosea (Hos. 1:1), and other prophets who identified their fathers and the days in which they prophesied, the work and personality of Obadiah lies in deep shadows. F. W. Farrar states of the penman, "Of his personal history not a single incident or even tradition has been preserved."² The one characteristic we may assign Obadiah is suggested by his name, which means "servant or worshiper of Jehovah." His name designated him as a man of God and suggests love for God and respect for His Word. Since he was used by Jehovah to reveal His will to man, we surmise that Obadiah lived up to his name. Even though Obadiah's message concerned God's judgment on the nation Edom, the fact that he lived up to his name may very well be one of the great unspoken lessons from the prophet. As Obadiah lived up to his name, Christians should live up to their name in the twentieth century. God's children, identified by the name Christian, are servants (Rom. 1:1) of God who are living sacrifices (12:1), and who glorify God through their lives (Matt. 5:16). Walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), Christians walk worthily of God (1 Thess. 2:12), living in such a way as to adorn the doctrine of God (Tit. 2:10). All of God's children must realize that shame can be brought upon God, His cause, and people when they do not live up to the name Christian (Rom. 2:24). As Obadiah's name identified him as a man of God, may the name Christian identify us as the faithful of God.

There are thirteen men in the Old Testament who wear the name Obadiah. Twelve of these are mentioned in a single verse of Scripture (including the penman of the book of Obadiah—v. 1). The only Obadiah among the thirteen of whom we have any information concerning his activities is the servant of Ahab. His faithfulness to Jehovah, Elijah, and the prophets of God is related in 1 Kings 18:3-16. The penman of Obadiah has been identified with at least three of those who are mentioned in the Old Testament:

Three characters have been nominated at various times: The Talmud (T.B. Sanhedrin 39b) suggests that the prophet is to be identified with Ahab's servant (1 Kings 18:3f). Pseudo-Epiphanius, **The Lives of the Prophets**, identifies him with Ahaziah's captain (2 Kings 1:13-15). Still others would make him a servant of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:7); but none of these cases are conclusive.³

Although the penman of Obadiah has been identified with at least three who bear his name, there is absolutely no evidence, externally or internally, which connects him with any of the three mentioned or the remaining nine who appear in the Old Testament.

It seems that any personal information concerning the penman of Obadiah is secondary to the message he revealed from Jehovah.

The Date Of Obadiah

The date of Obadiah's writing has been dated from 845 to 400 B.C. The two dates which seem to have the most supporters are 845 and 586 B.C. The date of the book, like the personal life of the prophet, is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty.

The event in the book of Obadiah which is used to determine the date of writing is the violence which was

done to Jacob, resulting in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (vv. 10-12). The author speaks of the disaster, destruction, and the day of distress. The difficulty is in identifying the event in the history of the Jewish people, since Jerusalem suffered at least four assaults by her enemies: (1) Shishak against Rehoboam, recorded in 1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chronicles 12:1-10. This action against Jerusalem did not result in her destruction, as pointed out in 2 Chronicles 12:7. (2) The Philistines and Arabians against Jehoram, reported in 2 Chronicles 21:16-17. (3) Joash against Amaziah, when he took all the gold and silver, the vessels of the house of God, treasures of the king's house, hostages, and broke down four hundred cubits of the wall around Jerusalem (2 Kings 14:8-14; 2 Chron. 25:17-24). (4) The fourth attack on Jerusalem was in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It was during this invasion that all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, the king's house, and the house of Jehovah was burnt with fire (2 Kings 25:9). The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed (25:10), and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were taken captive (25:11). The temple was razed, the pillars of brass were broken in pieces, the articles used in the ministry of the temple were taken away, and the chief priest and others were killed (25:13-21). In the once beautiful and proud city, only the poorest of the land were left (25:12). It seems that this event more closely fulfills the language of Obadiah verse twelve: disaster, destruction, and distress.

While there is favorable evidence for the 586 B.C. date for Obadiah, intellectual honesty must acknowledge the great difficulty in establishing, for certainty, the date of the book.

Occasion For Writing

Six inspired writers speak of the wrath of Jehovah upon Edom, or the Edomites, who were the descendants

of Esau (Gen. 36:43); Isaiah (34:5-15); Jeremiah (49:7-22); Ezekiel (25:12-14; 35:1-15); Amos (1:11-12); the psalmist (137:7); and Obadiah.

Moses, in Deuteronomy 23:7, commanded the children of Israel, “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother.” The Edomites were not so disposed toward the descendants of Jacob, for they dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance (Ezek. 25:12-14), gave over the children of Israel to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity (35:1-15), and, in the day of Jerusalem, their attitude was “rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof” (Psm. 137:7). The book of Obadiah reveals God’s judgment on Edom because of her violence to Jacob and rejoicing over Jacob’s disaster (vv. 10, 12). In Obadiah, the conflict between Jacob and Esau (their descendants—Israel and Edom) is brought into sharp focus.

The antagonism between Israel and Edom goes back to the birth of Jacob and Esau. In Genesis 25:23, God told Rebekah, “Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels: and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.” Even in the womb the children struggled (25:22). God chose Jacob, and the elder (Esau) served him. Jacob “bought” the birthright from Esau (25:27-34) and deceived Isaac to obtain the blessing (ch. 27). Because of these conflicts Esau hated Jacob, which resulted in Jacob being sent to the house of Laban in Haran (27:43). This conflict continues throughout the years and is passed from the fathers of these two nations to the nation themselves (Israel and Edom). This animosity surfaces when Israel leaves the land of bondage. Ready to enter the land of Canaan, Israel requests permission to travel through Edom. The Edomites refuse permission and would not allow Israel to pass (Num. 20:17-20). Later the

Edomites fought against David and were defeated. David “put garrisons in Edom...and the Edomites became servants to David” (2 Sam. 8:14; 1 Chron. 18:12-13; 1 Kings 11:15-17). During Jehoram’s reign over Judah, Edom revolted and was defeated by the king’s forces (2 Kings 8:20-22).

In the New Testament the hostility is reflected in the personalities of Jesus and Herod. Jesus (a descendant of Jacob), when told of a death threat made by Herod Antipas (a descendant of Esau), sent the king a stinging message: “Go and say to that fox, behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected” (Luke 13:32). Jesus lets Herod know that He intends to complete His work in spite of his threats.

The Edomites were like their father Esau. Hebrews 12:16 refers to Esau as a profane (**bebelos**) person. **Bebelos** describes the godless and irreligious. The profane person is one who has no concept of the spiritual, whose life is that of materialism—like father, like son (descendants). Kyle M. Yates observes:

The Edomites, like their father Esau, were a fleshly minded people, having no appreciation of the unseen and no dreams for the future. They lived for food, spoil and vengeance, with no national conscience or ideals.⁴

Homer Hailey states, “Throughout the writings of the prophets Edom stands as a symbol of the earthly, nonspiritual people of the world.”⁵ The Edomites stood against God and His people and suffered the consequences.

The Sins Of Edom

The sins which brought Edom’s downfall were pride (v. 3), violence done to Jacob (v. 10), cutting off Israel’s escape (v. 14), and they rejoiced over Israel’s disaster (v. 12).

Great Truths From Obadiah

1. Righteousness exalteth a nation (Prov. 14:34).
2. God's Word is steadfast. Edom's end came as God predicted through Obadiah (Obad. 1-4, 10; Jer. 49:18).
3. Pride goeth before destruction, as in Edom's case (Prov. 16:18).
4. To stand against God's people is to stand against God (1 Cor. 15:9; Acts 9:4).
5. God cares for and protects His children (Obad. 17).
6. God will always be victorious. Mt. Seir (Edom) would perish (Ezek. 35), but Mt. Zion (Israel) would be blessed (Obad. 17).

Endnotes

- 1 George L. Robinson, **The Twelve Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), pp. 67-68.
- 2 F. W. Faffar, **The Minor Prophets** (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph), p. 175.
- 3 Jack Lewis, **The Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), p. 89.
- 4 Kyle M. Yates, **Preaching From the Prophets** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1942), p. 170.
- 5 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 30.

CHAPTER 12

Commentary On The Book Of Obadiah

Wayne Coats

Introduction

OBADIAH, *SERVANT OF GOD* and worshiper of the Almighty! Who was this prophet, and whence did he hail? Like so many of the great and good people whose deeds are recorded in the eternal record, he was another “certain man.” Our blessed Lord gave a wonderful lesson about a certain Samaritan who helped an unfortunate victim on the Jericho road (Luke 10:33). His name is not recorded, but his deed has been forever remembered. The greatest giver in the time of Christ was “a certain poor widow” who cast two mites into the treasury (21:2). We dare not judge the value of a person by the standards of this world.

The little book of Obadiah is the smallest book in the Old Testament. Its size has resulted in finding it listed among the “minor prophets.” I believe every prophet called of God, moved by the Holy Spirit and who spoke by the guiding hand of Jehovah, was a major person in his time.

The humble, God-fearing, reverential, pious, Scripture-quoting gospel preachers who never make a great name for themselves are truly the greatest, because they are not too cultured, refined, and stiff to bow down and be servants of Jesus Christ. Jehovah has always

remembered and rewarded His faithful servants, among whom there have been many. Moses was acknowledged to be God's servant. Abraham was a faithful servant of the Lord. We cannot forget how faithfully Daniel served Jehovah. The peerless apostle to the Gentiles was a servant of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1). James was content to be "a servant of God and Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas. 1:1). What a blessed peace, what a joy Divine, to be numbered among the servants of the Most High God! Our Saviour and Lord said, "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27).

"Obadiah" means "worshiper." He was not too involved with the transient and ephemeral things of this world to keep him from worshiping his God. Man has two paramount duties in this life, and they can be summed up in serving and worshiping God. In this respect, every man should be an Obadiah. God could use the servant and worshiper in a wonderful way, and He still has a place for every Obadiah who loves the Lord.

The purpose of Obadiah's prophecy was to announce the severe punishment which was inevitable to Edom because of the violence which they had wrought against Israel. They would be called to account for their wickedness.

The name of Obadiah was frequent in the Old Testament era. There was an Obadiah who was governor in the house of Ahab (1 Kings 18:3). Others with the same name were mentioned elsewhere (1 Chron. 3:21; 7:3; 8:38; 9:16, 44; 27:19; 2 Chron. 17:7; 34:12; Ezra 8:9; Neh. 10:5).

Commentary

The Vision Of Obadiah

The prophet was a seer and was allowed by the Almighty to foretell the fate of wicked Edom. As a seer, one would have direct recourse to God (1 Sam. 9:9). He

would be one in whom the Word of God would spring forth. The Spirit of God would rest upon him (Num. 11:17-19). God would speak through him (Amos 3:7-8). While much of the Old Testament prophecy was predictive, not all was foretelling, but it basically involved the declaration of that which could not be known by natural means. After the revelation of God was completed in the New Testament, the role of the prophet passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-9).

Verse 1: “Thus saith the Lord God.” We can be sure that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men Of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Obadiah was telling exactly what the Lord God had said. He was not among those known as pseudo-prophets or false prophets. When we have a “thus saith the Lord,” we can speak with all the authority of heaven. When we do not have a “thus saith the Lord” for our teaching and practices, we are headed for destruction.

It is simply unbelievable to read of all the liberties which men have taken with the Word of the Lord God. Why will presumptuous men dare to loose where God has not loosed and bind where God has not bound?

“Concerning Edom.” What a pitiful history of a people! It did not have to be so. The story of Edom was like the lives of so many people we have known: filled with troubles, trials, turmoil, and continual disruptions for themselves and others. The Edomites sprang from Esau and, before the two babies, Jacob and Esau, were born, they struggled. Whatever problem that may or may not have been to Jacob and Esau, pity the poor mother who had to endure those internal struggles. Of course her anxieties had just begun.

As the twins grew up, “Isaac loved Esau...but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). Esau sold his birthright

to Jacob (25:33). When he was forty years old, Esau married two Hittite wives “which were a grief of mind unto Issac and Rebekah” (26:35).

After the kingdom had been established, Saul fought the enemies on every side against Moab and against the children of Ammon and against Edom (1 Sam. 14:47). During the reign of David, he “put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David’s servants” (2 Sam. 8:14). The Edomites were slaughtered by David’s army, and Joab was sent up to bury them (1 Kings 11:15).

During the reign of Solomon, Hadad the Edomite became an adversary. During the rule of Jehoshaphat, Edom joined with Ammon and Moab against Judah (2 Chron. 20:22). God told Ezekiel to prophesy against Edom (Ezek. 35:2). There had been a perpetual hatred and a shedding of blood against the children of Israel (35:5). They possessed spiteful minds (36:5).

“A report from the Lord.” The report from God would be the same as a “thus saith the Lord.” When God acts as the reporter, the message is worth listening to. It is still true that the Lord is in His holy temple.

“An ambassador is sent.” Oftentimes people speak about being an ambassador for Christ and God without knowing what the word means. We hear about young ambassadors and special ambassadors for Jesus, and such utterances betray one’s ignorance of the function of an ambassador. We must realize that we do not have the liberty to attach meanings to Biblical words as we please. Should we not exercise great caution to define and use Biblical words as intended by the Holy Spirit? Kings and rulers with great authority would have special ambassadors to convey their exact words and messages to other dignitaries.

Our Lord gave a lesson on counting the cost, and a great illustration was made relative to a king who would go to war. Jesus said the king would sit down and consult whether he could be victorious. If not, he would send an **ambassage** and desire conditions of peace (Luke 14:32). The ambassage was not someone who had received words from someone who had received words from someone who had received words from someone. This is the best that any modern, so-called ambassador can claim. The inspired Paul wrote, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Paul served as a high-ranking diplomat which none of us can lay claim to.

Verse 2: "I have made thee small among the heathen." We serve an Almighty God and One Who is capable of exalting as well as abasing. Edom would not believe that God could reduce them to nothing. Men, as well as nations, have perished in their own pomposity. The Bible is replete with examples of the great who have been reduced to smallness.

Verse 3: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Is there anything more destructive than pride? Is any sin more common in every community? What evil is as difficult to combat in our lives? Can anything be more deceptive? O that we would see our hearts as God sees them!

Edom had grown affluent and possessed some degree of strength. Isaiah wrote, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is travelling in the greatness of his strength?" (Isa. 63:1). It doesn't take long for man to begin to trust in himself and the greatness of his strength. Like the wise man, we should pray, "feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" (Prov. 30:8-9).

It is so often the case that the smaller the man, the greater his pride. The long list of harmful results which come from pride should cause one to be deeply concerned:

The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor
(Psm. 10:2).

Only by pride cometh contention (Prov. 13:10).

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall (16:18).

A man's pride shall bring him low (29:23).

And those that walk in pride, he is able to abase
(Dan. 4:37).

I will take away...them that rejoice in thy pride
(Zeph. 3:11).

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased (Matt. 23:12).

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (Jas. 4:6).

Laodicea was a proud congregation and needed nothing (Rev. 3:17). Ask the large, wealthy congregations what they need. They have everything they need, and, if something else is needed, why, of course, they will purchase it. It is unthinkable to be in need of anything.

“Thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock.”

The territory of Idumea was a rocky, mountainous area, and it has been suggested that Petra was its stronghold. The tourist who visits the deserted ruins of Petra cannot help but stand amazed at the rock-hewn fortification. Edom dwelt in the high places and felt secure. Like Masada a few centuries later, they felt that safety resided among the rocks, but the only safety for mankind is to be found in the Rock of Ages. Edom asked, “Who shall bring me down?”

The Lord said, “thence will I bring thee down.” When God brings a man down, He does a perfect job, and oftentimes He does a complete and finished job.

Verse 4: “as the eagle...among the stars.”

Although Edom exalted self as high as the eagle that has its nest among the stars, God could reach far enough to turn them up and over. We have a nation of people, as well as a brotherhood, who are enamored with the stars. We are star gazers, star worshipers, star supporters, star mimics and followers. If we want to round up an arena full of reprobates on a given Sunday, then get a star-studded crew to come in, and we can set a “nest among the stars.” I have observed that some saints seem not to know the difference between stars and clods. Did God keep His word? Was Edom brought down?

Verse 5: “how art thou cut off!” It isn’t likely that thieves and robbers would take every single item from a victim. Vintage gatherers would surely leave a few grapes, but Edom would be utterly destroyed.

Verse 6: “his hidden things.” Adam had his trees, Saul his Agag, and Edom his rocky clefts behind which to hide, but God is able to search out that which is hidden. It is true that “his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves” (Job 34:21-22). The psalmist wrote, “the Lord’s throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (Psm. 11:4). The wise man wrote, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Our Lord said the Father sees in secret (Matt. 6:4). How foolish for anyone to try to escape the all-seeing eye of Jehovah.

Verse 7: “thy confederacy” Edom had allied themselves with the wrong crowd, and, in time of peril, they had been deserted. While there was bread, the friends

were to be found at Edom's table, but what a deceptive company! The erstwhile friends have made Edom return to its border wounded. The prodigal son had friends as long as the inheritance lasted (Luke 15:30).

When the apostles were freed from prison, they went to their own company (Acts 4:23). It is better to be alone under a juniper tree as was Elijah than to enter into a confederacy with the wicked. The only confederacy in which we should be interested or affiliated is one which our Father will approve. At breakneck speed, men are rushing into all sorts of alliances, forums, conferences, leagues, unions, jamborees, and whatever the devil can make attractive; and new clubs and societies are being formed to accommodate the growing number of so-called Christians who are not content to be and do what God has commanded. Brethren used to believe that it was necessary and sufficient to do all in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17). It was a time when men were satisfied to be complete in Him (2:10).

It has been a mandate from Jehovah ever since He had a covenant people that His own should be free from entanglements with outsiders. God told Moses that His people should make no covenant with the Philistines (Exod. 23:32). He later spoke of the many peoples who dwelt in Canaan and said, "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee" (34:12). God told Moses that seven great and mighty nations would be cast out of Canaan, and he said, "thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2).

It would seem that the Lord would not have to repeat His Law continually, but stubborn men refuse to listen. After the land was settled, God declared, "And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land, ye shall

throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?" (Judg. 2:2).

While David reigned as king over Israel, the king of Ammon died. David sent some messengers to comfort Hanun, the son of the Ammonite king. Hanun took the servants of David and shaved them. He cut off their garments, "hard by their buttocks, and sent them away" (1 Chron. 19:4). Ah, but those men were "greatly ashamed" (v. 5). The entire sordid and shameful affair could have been avoided if David had not desired to become so chummy with the enemy. Imagine those dutiful servants streaking across the country with their buttocks bare. That is the picture portrayed even today by some of the compromisers who want to comfort the enemy.

Jehoshaphat joined in an affinity with Ahab, king of Israel. Very foolishly, Jehoshaphat agreed to go with Ahab against Ramoth-Gilead. He said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people" (2 Chron. 18:3). Four hundred prophets pronounced their blessings on the unholy alliance. Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him" (v. 6)? There was one other, but Ahab said, "I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil" (v. 7). When Micaiah was approached by the king's messenger, he was told, "Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good" (v. 12). After the battle, Jehu said to Jehoshaphat, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord"(19:2).

Isaiah pronounced a woe upon those rebellious children "That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!" (Isa. 30:2). He also said:

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help;
and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because
they are many; and in horsemen, because they
are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy
One of Israel, neither seek the Lord! (31:1).

Hosea said:

Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone (Hos. 4:17).

When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his
wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and
sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you,
nor cure you of your wound (5:13).

Ephraim feedeth on wind, and falleth after the
east wind: he daily increaseth lies and
desolation; and they do make a covenant with
the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt
(12:1).

Verse 8: “the wise men.” Edom must have felt proud
of her wise men. There are but few things that will cause
people to be bloated with egotism more than intellectual
pride. Some men can read a few books, and their heads
swell to such proportions that they will not fit into a
number two washtub. A person can be wise in the sight of
God, or he can be a fool. There are two passages of Scripture
which tell us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of
wisdom” (Prov. 9:10; Psm. 111:10): “For vain man would
be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job
11:12). It is amazing how many of us never seem to get
very far from this manner of birth. I have seen a great
number of asses’ colts, but never yet have I seen one with
a head as large and long as some of our modern preachers.
The wise man wrote, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear
the Lord, and depart from evil” (Prov. 3:7). Isaiah wrote,
“Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and
prudent in their own sight” (Isa. 5:21). “Seest thou a man

wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov. 26:12). Paul wrote, "Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12:16). He also said, "if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). We may be able to impress fools with our worldly wisdom, but I do not believe that God is so dense as to be placated by some puny man.

Verse 9: "thy mighty men." Edom gloried in her men of might. She felt safe because of a great show of strength, but God decreed that "every one of them" would be cut off by slaughter.

Do you suppose we will ever learn to trust in God, depending on Him for our help and strength? Will we cease and desist from thinking that Divine strength comes through numbers? It is certain that we need to do some changing in our thinking.

There are some supposedly "mighty" men among us today, and, by listening, we might think that their might transcends the combined power of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the inspired Word. Compare the utterances of these men of might with the written Word, and it will be seen that mighty men are followed much more than God. The church is marching headlong to destruction in so many places because of the liberal and compromising influence of its "mighty" men. Listen as they carry the congregations around on the carousel of Calvinism to the tune that we are saved by grace alone, the kingdom has not yet come, the Holy Spirit leads and directs in a supra manner, and other denominational doctrines contrary to that revealed in the Bible. A man has to be "mighty" who can palm off all the falsehood and error that is being swallowed by weak and flaccid church members, but such men are only great and mighty in the eyes of puny men, for indeed Almighty God must look with disdain and disgust upon such characters.

O that we could admit and act as if we were creatures in the hand of the Creator! When will we give up the foolish notion that we are the potters and God is but the clay?

The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, and he said, "There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by them that were slain by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit" (Ezek. 32:29). The prophet also said, "The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword?" (v. 21). They thought they were up, but "they are gone down." That is what happens to all of the upper scum who presume to be godlets of various descriptions. Edom could teach us if we would listen: "with their terror they are ashamed of their might" (v. 30). Would it ever be possible to get us to be ashamed before God? I do not think so, for the "greater" can hardly be ashamed before the "lesser."

The Bible informs us of some men who were mighty. There were Nimrod, Abijah, Benaiah, Zadok and Jotham, but, with all their greatness, only a few people can remember anything about them. Mighty men move on like the rest of us and are soon forgotten. When David heard of the death of King Saul and Jonathan, he was deeply moved. He exclaimed, "how are the mighty fallen!" (2 Sam. 1:19).

Puny men may glory and boast, but Jehovah God is still the Almighty One. Solomon wrote, "That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he" (Eccl. 6:10). Job declared, "He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty" (Job 12:19), and "He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty" (v. 21).

The word of the Lord came to Zerubbabel, saying, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the

Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). We need to be called back to a remembrance of what Paul wrote to Corinth when he said, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor. 1:26). The apostle declared of himself, “For I am the least of the apostles” (15:9). He wrote that he was “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). His appraisal of himself can best be seen when he said, “I am nothing” (2 Cor. 12:11).

It might help a few of us to remember that:

the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Mighty angels are to be considered of more importance than mighty men.

Verse 10: “violence against thy brother.” Isn’t it strange that the first violence ever committed was brother against brother? Cain slew his brother, and the murderous spirit has been on the rampage ever since. The violence of Edom was seen when 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” (Amos 1:11). The psalmist wrote, “Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son” (Psm. 50:20).

There is no limit to the wickedness, hurt, harm, and difficulty which brethren will impose on each other. If there is any group of people on earth who should be amicable, loving, and helpful to each other, it should be brothers in Christ. There is no feeling that can emerge from the bottomless pits of hell that is not now harboured in the hearts of some brethren, and it is time we began to revamp our thoughts toward brethren if we want to spend eternity in heaven.

Jesus said, "But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:22). Paul wrote, "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). He also wrote, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (v. 21). Again he said, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10). There is a brotherhood that we must love (1 Pet. 2:17). We must demonstrate the needed quality of brotherly kindness (2 Pet. 1:7). Instead of bitterness, acrimony, and hard feelings, there must be brotherly love (Heb. 13:1). Paul declared, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9).

There will be no problem of violence in the heart of Edom toward his brother when the heart is filled with love. John reminds us:

He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,
and there is none occasion of stumbling in him
But he that hateth his brother is in darkness (1
John 2:10-11).

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother,
he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother
whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom
he hath not seen? (4:20).

It is not a demonstration of genuine love to allow a brother to persist in error without making an attempt to help him. Neither is it showing love when brethren espouse false teaching and make it more difficult for faithful brethren.

They tell me there is a conspiracy of a few preachers who have met together, and they have an avowed purpose

to change the church of my Lord. Is this something akin to that love which we read about in the Bible? Is it a lovable attitude to teach heresy that would destroy the bride of Christ?

Some brethren have gone so very far as to think that one cannot oppose sectarianism in the church and do so with a loving heart. This is beyond the ridiculous. This prevailing attitude is that everything must be positive and loving. One brother in a recent bulletin article disdains the idea of being negative, and yet he demotes another brother for declaring that we ought to be set positively against error.

The Bible teaches that God loves us, yet He chastens, rebukes, and corrects us. Is God unjust? Can he not love us and also chasten? The apostle wrote:

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits, and live? (Heb. 12:5-9).

Solomon wrote, “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:11-12).

It is beyond proper reasoning to think that love will tolerate error, evil, and foolishness. Solomon wrote by inspiration when he declared, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him

betimes” (13:24). Our blessed Lord said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev. 3:19).

Lest we lose sight of Edom’s problem, remember that violence, hurt, and harm were in his heart. We dare not evince such an attitude toward our brothers, neither should we become afflicted with lockjaw toward their false teaching. The very text we are studying depicts the severity of God toward wickedness.

Verse 11: “thou stoodest on the other side.” Have you wondered why some people have so much trouble trying to determine whose side they are on? Edom was a pretty sorry outfit, but at least people knew where they stood. They elected to stand with strangers and foreigners. They were “as one of them.” The psalmist described the Edomites when he said, “Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof” (Psm. 137:7). How desperately they wanted Jerusalem to be destroyed, even to the foundation. In their wickedness they were trying to help the enemy, and, of course, their effort was an attempt at supplanting the plans and purposes of God. It didn’t work.

There have always been those who opposed the way of Jehovah. The right side has enemies on the wrong side. Truth is ever assailed by error. The gates of hell have been opened wide, and a great number of brethren have little trouble trying to decide where to stand. Issues arise which are as decisive and clear-cut as the Lord can present them, and so very many brethren decide that they will not decide and will spend time studying the matter. That means they want to dampen the finger, hold it aloft, and see which way the wind blows, and that will help them to make a powerful decision.

A few thousand years ago when Moses went up to receive the law, the Israelites had Aaron to make a golden

calf. They were naked when Moses returned to the camp. Upon seeing the shameful and disgraceful behavior of the people, "Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me" (Exod. 32:26). It did not pay to turn against God (v. 28).

When Jezebel painted her face and looked out the window, she saw Jehu. As he looked at the evil woman, Jehu said, "Who is on my side? Who?" (2 Kings 9:32). That is a good question, provided we are on the side of the Lord. It was the psalmist who said, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: What can man do unto me?" (Psm. 118:6). The writer also said:

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us (124:1-3).

Verse 12: "thou shouldest not have looked on...neither shouldest thou have rejoiced...neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress." The indecisive attitude was seen when Edom became a spectator in a time of distress. There has never been a time when the grandstands have been so full of spectators. While others fight to win the prize and sail through bloody seas, we find a soft and padded pew, lean back, and are at ease.

It was not an accident that Joshua said:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

They had to decide.

When Elijah confronted the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, he said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). Do you suppose they wanted to study the issue a bit more?

A most interesting event happened during the life of Gideon. Baalism had become very popular with the people. The Lord directed Gideon to go out and throw down the altars of Baal and cut down the groves. Gideon took ten men and, after nightfall, he went out and did as he was ordered. The next morning there were some angry worshipers of Baal. In fact they were so terribly upset that they wanted to kill Gideon (Judg. 6:30). God did not approve of error during the days of Gideon, and He still doesn't approve of it, and, when modern Baalism is opposed, "the men of the city" get upset, and, though they would not literally kill Gideon, they would certainly try to kill his influence.

Verse 13: "Thou shouldest not...have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity." Some people enjoy seeing others suffer, and this was the attitude of Edom. When calamity came upon Judah, Edom entered into the gates and began to loot and plunder, thus adding insult to injury. Instead of offering assistance, the burden was made heavier. Pity those in any congregation of the Lord who make it difficult for others to live a Christian life. We know of any number of Gospel preachers who have been treated worse than animals by brethren in the Lord. Some of these have become so discouraged and despondent that they would have walked out of the pulpit never to preach again. This should not be, but God will not overlook the hardships imposed on good brethren by evil and scheming characters.

Great and godly shepherds have often been the dartboard against which the fiery darts of devilish brethren have been thrown. The Bible teaches that we are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

Verse 14: "Neither shouldst thou have stood in the crossway." So revengeful was Edom that escape routes out of the city were occupied in order to apprehend any who were trying to escape. Those who were caught were delivered up to the captors. Also, those who remained inside the city were captured and turned over to the enemy.

Some people seem to have a really difficult time trying to figure out who the enemy is. When Alexander Campbell met Robert Owen in debate, the Protestant clergy in the city just couldn't seem to decide where to stand.

When E. A. Elam went to Henderson, Tennessee in 1903 to conduct a Gospel meeting, some of the men who sympathized with the digressives tried to stop the meeting. Brother Elam and the sound brethren were forced out of the meeting house, and the series was completed in the Baptist meeting house.

Certain liberal, compromising editors and professors will join with the digressives in opposition to faithful and sound brethren. We should all strive to go to heaven for many reasons, but especially so we won't have to spend an eternity in hell with such sleazy traitors of our Lord. We need to stand for the truth and not stand in the crossways.

Verse 15: "as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." This is a principle that is as old as creation. God declared, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind" (Gen. 1:11). Sow a seed and reap the harvest. We can be sure that our sins will find us out (Num. 32:23). We are certain that "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). We are positive that the law of

retribution has not been repealed in the court of heaven. We should strive to abide by that great axiom which reads, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Verse 16: "ye have drunk upon my holy mountain." Edom had been the recipient of blessings for which it was not grateful. Whatever they might have done, they had been upon the holy mountain of God. Why not realize the marvelous blessing of being allowed to be on God's mountain? Moses had been to the mountain when he received the Law (Exod. 19:3). Peter, James, and John went to the mountain when our Lord was transfigured before them (Matt. 17:1). The disciples went with our Lord out to the Mount of Olives, whence He ascended back to heaven (28:16). The church of Christ, the mountain of the Lord's house, was established in the top of the mountain. We have been allowed to drink from God's holy mountain, and surely we can do better than Edom.

Verses 17-21: "deliverance, holiness, and saviours." Better days were coming for the house of Jacob. There would be blessings to come upon Mount Zion and there would be holiness. As for Esau, there would be none remaining. Edom had sown to the wind and would reap the whirlwind. There would no longer be any semblance of them, for, indeed, they would be as though they had not been. Is this not the way of all the wicked?

In the change and arrangement according to Jehovah, the prophet declared, "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." What a blessed peace, what a joy Divine, to lean upon the everlasting arms of Jehovah, Who has made it possible for us to have a faith that overcomes the world, giving us the victory in Christ, a peace that passeth all understanding, a joy unspeakable, a love that passeth knowledge, a kingdom immovable, and a crown that fadeth not away, "reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

CHAPTER 13

Great Lessons From The Book Of Obadiah

Lynn Matheny

Commendation

PREACHING FROM OBADIAH IS a very timely subject. Preaching faithfully from any book of the Bible is a very timely matter for our brotherhood today. This church is to be commended for the good work that it does. Especially is she to be commended for this great lectureship and the eternal good that the lectureship book will do. This writer admits that he has a greater appreciation for the book of Obadiah than before this assignment, and it's his desire that, after the study of these twenty-one verses, you also will have a greater appreciation for this wonderful man of God and the book of which he is the penman.

Introduction

Let us use the introduction to get some background information that will help us in our study. Obadiah is without any personal history. The name was very common, and attempts have been made to identify our prophet with one of the dozen or more Obadiahs mentioned in the Old Testament, and all without success. Evidently, the author saw his work as more important than the worker, and gave us no information about himself. Since there is no personal

history of Obadiah, it is impossible to accurately affix the date of his prophecy. Clear reference is made to the capture of Jerusalem, and many believe that the capture referred to is that by Nebuchadnezzar.

These twenty-one prophetic verses are against Edom, whose doom and downfall Obadiah presents. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau. They were proud, bitter, resentful neighbors and foes of Jacob. Their ancient kingdom lay to the south of the Wadi Zered below the Dead Sea. It was a mountainous and rugged land mass. This is where Esau settled after his brother Jacob fled from him to Padan-aram.

At the destruction of Jerusalem, the Edomites stood by and even rejoiced at the calamity falling upon Israel. For those that could have escaped, the Edomites refused passage through their country. Now Judah can take comfort. Edom said, "Who shall bring me down?," and God said, "I will bring thee down." Although they had built the practically impregnable city of Petra, God could and would bring them down. Nothing can save them from the coming judgment of God for their brutal treatment of the Israelites. Edom is doomed, but Israel shall be restored and blessed because "the saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's" (Obad. 21).

Preaching From The Text

"Thus saith the Lord" in verse one tells us that Obadiah was speaking from the words of God. "We have heard tidings from Jehovah" means he was careful to listen to God and to say what God wanted said. The church is in desperate need of men to stand and preach "thus saith the Lord." Men today are charged, "If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God...that in all things God

may be glorified” (1 Pet. 4:11). A lot of our preaching today is not glorifying God. God wants the Truth preached so men can be set free from sin (John 8:32). God wants the Gospel preached because it’s His power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Some preachers are preaching the truth but not all the Truth. We do brethren a great disservice when we do not declare unto them “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The hue and cry of many members not to hear anything negative has caused many preachers to draw back from preaching on many subjects that the brethren need to grow spiritually. When Peter said that “newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile,” he surely didn’t mean a bottle of this but none of that, when we know that God gave both for growth (1 Pet. 2:2). Let us all be faithful as was Obadiah and speak all of God’s Word and only God’s Word.

“The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee.”

They were so prideful they thought that they could live high enough in the rocks that no one could bring them down and even said, “Who shall bring me down to the ground?” They forgot about God! For God’s answer was, “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” (Obad. 4). The wise man taught us that nothing but destruction and fall would come from pride and a haughty spirit (Prov. 16:18). God also said, “A man’s pride shall bring him low” (29:23). How haughty and silly man can be! He shouts, “No one can bring me down,” and all the while his pride is doing just that. There are preachers in the brotherhood today that are so powerful (or think they are) that they have become prideful. You go to them in a loving way to discuss things they are preaching (error), and they let you know that they are so high that

they can not be brought down. Oh, yes, God said their own pride would bring them down! The great tragedy of it all is they will bring congregations down with them and many souls will be lost.

“How are the things of Esau searched!” We have just considered Esau as the type of the self-confident and lifted-up, dwelling so high that he cannot be brought down. But there is more! Esau is like the worldly person. As the father of this race, he bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage. His race yet lives! Multitudes today reject kinship with the Christ for the so-called pleasures of the world. The world so blinds the eyes of these that they cannot see the good life in the Christ. The abundant life of John 10:10 is not seen by them, and they think others who do not follow their worldly ways are just foolish. But these things will be searched out, and God’s Word will prevail. We are told not to love the world. If we do, the love of the Father is not in us. The world will pass away with the lust thereof, “but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17). An inheritance incorruptible in heaven is forfeited for some foolish toy here on the earth: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

“All the men of thy confederacy...the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee...they that eat thy bread lay a snare under thee.” Companionship began with God and is of the Divine mind. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” We know the value of association. But there are two kinds of companionship: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20), and “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). True friends bring strength, but friendships built on other-than-right principles bring weakness and ruin. Like Edom of old, we may be brought

down by those that eat our bread. What more important companionship than that of husband and wife? Yet so many do not let God guide them in this matter. Many parents are not taking the time to teach their children what God has said about marriage. No longer do some preachers have the courage to preach what the Bible says about it. Unlawful mates are sending souls to hell! Alliances with false teachers are sending others (2 John 9-11). Brethren, it is past time for us to wake up to what God has said about these things. Edom was destroyed because of it, and we will fare no better!

“Shall I not in that day, saith Jehovah, destroy the wise men out of Edom?” It has always been true that God brings to nought the wisdom of the world. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:19, quotes Isaiah 29:14, where God says, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought.” Paul was making the point that, to the worldly wise, the words of the cross were foolishness. He goes on to teach that the world through its wisdom cannot know God. God says don’t glory in wisdom, might or riches, but know Him. We are not wise unless we know Him. Confidence in wisdom is false confidence that will get us nowhere with God. Paul said that it takes “the foolishness of preaching to save,” and we are foolish if we don’t understand this. Those that preach have been charged to “preach the word” and to be urgent “in season, out of season,” which means to preach the Word all the time. To the worldly wise, it won’t be popular, and many will not accept it and obey it, but a charge from the Lord is one wherein we must be faithful.

“In the day that thou stoodest on the other side...even thou wast as one of them.” In the day of Judah’s distress, Edom, Judah’s kinsman, should have helped their brethren. Neutrality is sin! Jesus said, “He

that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Matt. 12:30). Edom was just as guilty as if they had done the evil deed themselves. We need to learn this lesson! Listen to God: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of Jehovah. Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, Because they came not to the help of Jehovah, To the help of Jehovah against the mighty" (Judg. 5:23). When you don't come to the help of God's people, you don't help God. When you don't help, you're against! God cursed a city because they did not help! We have those in the church that are not coming to the help of the people of God. Faithful men and women of God are being ripped apart for standing for the Truth, and others in the church are just standing by looking on. Many of these believe the Truth, know the Truth, but they have not the courage to even support the ones taking the public stand. What a terrible shame! This writer and others like him have known preachers that have never, with pen or spoken word, defended the faith against false teachers and their destructive error. Yet these very men go about enjoying the fruits of others' labors. Let it be known to every reader that this is not right! Edom watched! And God said, "even thou wast as one of them" (Obad. 11). Guilty because you were neutral! "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom.15:4). God bitterly cursed Meroz for no more, maybe even less, than what is happening today in the church. Will we learn from this? God please help us!

"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee."

Watch this Divine principle be brought over into the New Testament: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-8). God did not want to destroy Edom,

but they had sown the seeds of their own destruction. God doesn't want to condemn us (2 Pet. 3:9), but we sow to our "own flesh" and "shall of the flesh reap corruption." We bring this upon ourselves:

Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, so that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

All that is meant by God's love was there for Edom. But Edom's sins had hid His face. The principle of sin was in place. Sin separates! Just as sure as God is God, we're going to reap what we sow. What a blessing! If we sow to the Spirit, we will reap eternal life. Paul says "Don't faint" or "be weary," "for in due season we shall reap."

"But in Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy." Here we see the Lord's kingdom being spoken of by Obadiah. The **key** to all prophecy was the church, and it is no different with Obadiah. It would be established on Mt. Zion (in Jerusalem) (Obad. 17; Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). Edom stood in the crossway and cut off the escape of the people (Obad. 14), but the church of the Lord established in Jerusalem would be open to all, Jew and Gentile. Everything that can be done by God has been done, and the escape route is as wide as the love of Christ.

Note the reading again: "shall be holy." The church is made up of holy people. You notice the writer didn't say "ought" or "should" be holy. You might say, "Well, I'm not a member of a church that is holy!" Then you're not a member of Christ's church. The very meaning of the word "church" in the Greek is "the called out," meaning those that have come out of the world and are now in the kingdom of Christ,

having been washed by His blood. I don't believe the phrase, "The church is full of sinners." The church is made up of the "washed," and, when Christ washes something, it is not dirty! It is clean.

Notice in this regard 1 Peter 1:15: "Like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living." And verse sixteen continues by saying, "because it is written, ye shall be holy; for I am holy." In verse fifteen, the verb "be" is the force of "become" and means that we are going to grow and take on the holiness of our God. But we are also holy at baptism because God has forgiven all past sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16), and He will remember them no more (Heb. 8:12).

"And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." My, what a beautiful statement as it applies to the church! We as God's people have so many spiritual blessings to possess. The context of Ephesians 1:3 tells us that all spiritual blessings are in the Christ our Lord. That means there is not one spiritual blessing that God's people cannot possess if we get our "want to" in order and working.

Many of us do not possess the spiritual blessing of spiritual growth because we refuse to study (1 Pet. 2:2). We do not possess the blessing that comes from saving the lost because we will not teach them. Elders do not possess the blessing of overseeing a pure church because they refuse to lead in discipline. Brethren, Obadiah will preach! And preach! And preach!

Many young people will not possess the blessings that come from having a Christian home because they refuse to make the preparations that are necessary to have such. Many parents will have heartaches and not blessings because they took not the time to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They were too busy with other things. And many times these were puny and unimportant things. Not only are these blessings lost,

but these lead to other unpossessed possessions—such as the church being without great leaders because men lost their children to the world. My, what a sad tale it is. So many unpossessed possessions!

Conclusion

“And the kingdom will be the Lord’s.” What a beautiful way for Obadiah to end the book. The church would belong to Christ. Esau had sold his birthright, and Edom had been brought down. Judah can take comfort knowing that God is faithful and that His purpose to save His people through Christ will surely come about. Brethren, preach Obadiah! Preach the other prophets. Preach all of God’s Word!

CHAPTER 14

Introduction To The Book Of Jonah

Roger Jackson

Introduction

JONAH WAS AN ISRAELITE who lived in Galilee. He was the son of Amittai of the city Gath-hepher. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 and prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom, which would date his prophecy between 783 and 743 B.C. His message was addressed to the ancient city of Nineveh. He is the only prophet whose message was addressed entirely to foreign people and whose work was done on foreign soil.

The name “Jonah” means “dove” and was probably prophetic in anticipation of his reaction to the command to go and preach to Nineveh. There are three references to Jonah in the New Testament, in which the Lord referred to him and the men of Nineveh (Matt. 12:38-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). To deny the genuineness or authenticity of the book is to repudiate the Divinity of our Lord. For the prophetic significance of the story of Jonah we recommend reading brother J. W. McGarvey’s book **Jesus and Jonah**. The chapter divisions delineate the natural divisions of the book. George Robinson suggests the following analysis:

Chapter 1, Jonah’s disobedience: “running away from God.”

Chapter 2, his prayer: “running to God.”

Chapter 3, his preaching to Nineveh: “running with God.”
Chapter 4, his complaints: “running ahead of God.”¹

There are a number of allegorical interpretations of the book. Edward J. Young, in his introduction to the Old Testament, suggests:

1. Israel's disobedience.
2. Her death in captivity.
3. Her repentance.
4. Her release as a resurrection from the dead.
5. Her mission, through the Messiah, to all men.²

Jack P. Lewis is more general in his allegorical analysis in his work on the minor prophets:

1. The universality of God's presence (compare Psm. 139:7-12; Amos 9:2-4) and the ideas of the localized God (1 Sam. 26:19; 1 Kings 20:23, 28; 2 Kings 5:17ff);
2. The universal concern of God for man (compare Acts 10:34-35; John 3:16);
3. The conditional nature of prophecy (compare Jer. 18:7ff).³

Paul Kidwell, Sr., summed up Jonah's message in these words:

Jonah cared not for Nineveh, so he could hardly rejoice when repentance on her part saved her from destruction. It is only when we care for men while they are lost, and evidence that concern by reaching them with the gospel, that we may then rejoice with the angels in heaven when they repent.⁴

Jonah teaches us that, when we do things God's way, all will be well with us. However, there are many congregations of the Lord's people that are leaving a false impression that there is peace among the brethren and

that God is pleased with them. The truth of the matter is that sin is not being rebuked at all, but is being swept under the rug. They often proclaim that they do not have any problems when, in reality, the problems are not being addressed. The rebellious in their midst are not being rebuked, and they have no intention of changing their lives. The ocean of God's displeasure is raging and foaming about them, but the sinners are asleep in the hold and the crew is standing idly by while the good ship of Zion is sinking.

Jonah reminds us that the life of one sailor may endanger an entire ship and crew. It takes only one to tear a congregation apart. No vessel can long hoist the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel if it refuses to convert or rid itself of Jonahs. Instead it is the common practice to challenge the man who exposes Jonah and throw him overboard. We cannot throw anybody out of the church, but Jonah's lesson is that of exclusion, and that we are required to do (Eph. 5:11). A permissive congregation that does not address its problems and rebuke sin will become a haven for wickedness. The word soon gets around, and sinners know where they can go to find a peaceful environment where they can live any way they please. We must disturb the rest of the disturbers and, if they will not repent, we must throw them overboard, i.e., withdraw.

Since the Bible says these things were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4), we suggest that the following lessons regarding preaching, dealing with sin, rebellion, and repentance are suggested by the case of Jonah.

Running In The Wrong Direction

God told Jonah to go east to Nineveh. Instead, he went west to Tarshish. This is the attitude of the rebellious in the church. Why is it that the same people, generally speaking, are always on the wrong side and headed in the

wrong direction while others are never a problem? Every congregation has its people who walk “disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6). They are out of step, or stepping in the wrong direction. Others maintain a foreign allegiance. Their hearts were never in the kingdom at all. They live miserable lives of sinfulness and do not care who knows it. The way they talk, the things they do, and the companionship they keep bespeak an attitude of total disregard for spiritual values. Why they even bother to attend services I do not know. These souls are uncontrollable and have made it clear that their allegiance is to the devil and their citizenship is of his kingdom (Matt. 7:15; John 8:44; Gal. 2:4; 1 John 2:19). Are we to assume that we have no alternative but to suffer such men to remain in our fellowship? Challenging them means a fight most of the time. Their weapons are carnal, including lies, threats, hatred, division, and even physical violence. However, the Bible is clear in its instructions regarding such men (Rom. 16:17, 19). It was to just such a class of sinners that Paul addressed in 1 Timothy 4:1-2:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

Like Jonah, these sinners will sleep in the hold as long as no one disturbs them, for they are unconcerned about the problems they cause or the fate of the ship. Achan let a lot of good men die rather than confess his sin (Josh. 7:20). The crew was as unconcerned about the trouble Jonah was causing as Jonah was at first. They knew he was running away from God because he had told them (Jonah 1:10). God wanted them to get busy and do something about it. The sin of silence in the face of wickedness was condemned in the case of the man who

was living with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1). God was highly displeased with Jonah and the crew, and He is just as displeased with congregations that will not do what is right today (Rev. 2:5). We cannot long claim to be His people if we refuse to do what He says.

At first, the crew rejected Jonah's (God's) solution. Perhaps their reasoning was similar to reasoning today when discipline is suggested: "If we start that we will have to throw everybody overboard;" "It will tear the ship up;" "It will cause trouble in the ship;" "I never heard of it before;" "Nobody is a perfect sailor;" "We are not the judge." God said, "Throw him overboard!"

Repentance May Require Extreme Action

For most people all it takes to get them to repent is an awareness of their condition and a mild rebuke (Luke 17:3), but we are not talking about "most people." We speak of people who would not repent though one rose from the dead (16:31). Jonah had to be swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:17-2:10). Some people keep gold fish or tropical fish in an aquarium; perhaps what we need at each congregation is a big tank full of big fish!

The Word of God is His means of converting sinners in and out of the church (Heb. 4:12). There is something seriously wrong with a man who will cling to a life of sin, considering that great Divine sacrifice of the Son of God (John 12:32; 3:17). It is clear that such cases may demand extreme action for the salvation of a sinner's soul. Our Lord used "mighty works" as proof of His Deity for the purpose of causing men to repent and then cited the case of Jonah as prophetic to the times in which He lived:

The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for they repented at (lit. "into," RJ) the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here (Luke 11:32).

This saying was true because the reaction of the hearers was so different. Jonah had not done any miracles before his auditors, and yet they repented. Christ had done many mighty works, and, yet, His reception was contempt: “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matt. 12:42).

The Word is God’s only power to bring men to repentance today (Rom. 1:16). Another means is available to bring men back to obedience to that Word. Some men are beyond God’s reach through the Gospel because they have willed it to be so. They will not confess their sins, neither will they walk in the light (1 John 1:7-10). God says, “Throw him overboard.” Discipline may cause others to fear (1 Tim. 5:20).

The Faithful Proclamation Of God’s Word Will Save Souls

There is a brighter side to all of this. Jonah converted an entire city with an eight-word sermon (in English): “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). Now that wasn’t very positive, was it? But that is what God required Jonah to preach, and any man who will not preach it like God says to is not a Gospel preacher; he is fish bait! The citizens of Nineveh probably did not feel good about themselves at the end of the sermon. Jonah did not preach, “I’m okay; you’re okay,” or, “Good news, Nineveh; God loves you!” Things were not okay; they were rotten, and God wanted things changed.

Our generation has heard the Gospel preached repeatedly, and rebellious brethren have been exhorted to reform their lives time and again without the slightest indication of improvement other than, “Well, I’ll think about it.” What a witness against them old Nineveh will

be! God changed His great mind. What a thought—that men can actually change the mind of God by repentance, it being brought about by the preaching of the Word! Thank God for His mercy. Just making men feel good about themselves is not the answer to sinfulness. Forgiveness is the answer, and that takes place in the mind of God, not the mind of the sinner. Men are going to perish without repentance (Luke 13:3), and God won't change His mind about that fate unless we change our minds about sin (Acts 17:30-31).

All Of God's People Should Rejoice When A Soul Is Saved

Jonah was full of malice and wanted Nineveh to go to hell right now (Jonah 4:2-3). He sat under his gourd vine to await their backsliding and condemnation. This is the most unusual and paradoxical behavior in the Bible record. Who would actually want souls to be lost?

We live in a time when it's hard to get brethren to stay a few minutes after services to witness a child born into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). We don't want them to be lost, but how much do we care that they are saved? When erring brothers or sisters come forward to confess their sins and request prayer (Jas. 5:16), what do we do? We leave without speaking a word of encouragement. And sometimes we hear, "Just wait, he won't last," or, "We will just wait and see before we take you back." In some cases a brother's confession is actually rejected, as if his forgiveness depended on us! A brother who confesses his sins does not have to be forgiven by us in order to be forgiven by God, but we must forgive if we expect God to forgive us (Matt. 6:14-15). It is a miserable existence to spend our lives punishing people, getting even, and taking vengeance when vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:17-21).

Conclusion

Jonah has given us a glimpse into the great character of God. He loves all men and desires their salvation (Jonah 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). His creatures do not always go where He directs. We do not always preach to the people He designates. We do not always say the things He wants us to say. We do not always live the way He would have us to live, and we do not always listen when He corrects us. Perhaps the conclusion of the whole matter is this: there are too many Jonahs and not enough great, big fish.

Endnotes

1 George L. Robinson, **The Twelve Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 77.

2 Edward J. Young, **An Introduction To The Old Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wiliam B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 264.

3 Jack P. Lewis, **The Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), p. 44.

4 Paul T. Kidwell, Sr., "The Living Message of Jonah," **The Living Messages Of The Books Of The Old Testament**, eds. Garland Elkins & Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, 1977), p. 361.

CHAPTER 15

Commentary On The Book Of Jonah

Perry Hall

Introduction

THE SACRED WRITER FIRST introduces us to the prophet Jonah in 2 Kings 14:23-25, where he records the setting of this historical character:

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant, Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.

In the above passage we note the division of Israel into two kingdoms. This had taken place about one hundred years prior to Jonah. The events of the book of Jonah transpired shortly after 800 B.C. Many believe Jonah was the first chronologically of all the written prophets, major or minor. The Assyrian empire ruled the world during this period and would continue for two hundred more years. The northern kingdom of Israel was

already paying tribute to Assyria. We note that Jeroboam II was an evildoer in the order of Jeroboam I. Apostasy was apparent, but it was a temporary time of prosperity for Israel. God's patience waited. Gath-hepher, the home of Jonah in Zebulun, was located about four miles northeast from what would later be the city of Nazareth, in Galilee. Jonah, being a prophet, was one of those men raised up by God to speak His Word.

Some men have declared the book of Jonah to be a parable or allegory; but it is treated in the Bible as an actual historical account of actual historical events. There is absolutely no reason to believe otherwise. Jesus Christ approved the book as historical fact by comparing Jonah's three-day-and-night encounter with the great fish with His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32).

Much more can be learned concerning the background and purpose of the book of Jonah by reading the chapter on introductory material. Let us now proceed with the actual text.

Refusal: God's Call And The Prophet's Flight (Jonah 1:1-16)

Futilely Fleeing—Verses 1-3

As a prophet is one who speaks for another, we discover that "the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai" (v. 1). Without this Divine directive and message, Jonah could not be a prophet of God. The prophet of God was to speak the Word of God (cf. Deut. 18:18-22; Heb. 1:1). Jonah (Heb.—"a dove"), son of Amittai ("truth"), was to carry the message of God: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (v. 2). "Arise, go" denotes the urgency, importance, and fervency Jonah is to attach to the mission.

He is to cry against the wickedness of Nineveh. Though Nineveh was a great city, great in size (estimated 600,000) and great in wickedness, Jonah was not to be afraid to carry out God's commission, just as we must not allow fear to keep us today from carrying out Christ's Great Commission to carry His Gospel to every nation and creature (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). As in the days of Noah, God could no longer tolerate the wickedness of these people. Jonah must go with God's call to repentance, if Nineveh was to be saved: "But Jonah rose up to flee" (v. 3). Jonah went, but in the opposite direction of Tarshish. Tarshish is generally thought to have been a Phoenician settlement in Spain, west of the Rock of Gibraltar. Jonah wanted to get as far away from God's will and his own prophetic responsibilities as he could. Nineveh was well-known for idolatry, cruelty, and immorality. Assyria was a name that struck fear and panic into the hearts of her neighbors. Prisoners of war were often flayed; hands, fingers, noses, and ears were cut off, and eyes were put out. Sometimes people were burned with fire. Pregnant women were ripped open to destroy their offspring. There can be little doubt that Jonah was ready for God to destroy Nineveh, but he knew that God was gracious and forgiving to those that would repent (Exod. 34:6-7). He did not want Nineveh to have the opportunity to repent (Jonah 4:2). Jonah fled fifty miles to the seaport city of Joppa. There he found a ship and paid for passage to Tarshish. Satan provides opportunity for those who want to disobey God. Jonah was futilely striving to flee from God's presence (Psm. 139:1-12).

Stormy Sea—Verses 4-6

It was now the Lord's move. He sent out, or literally cast or threw down upon the sea, a great storm, which began to seriously endanger the safety of the ship (v. 4).

The Hebrew word means “to agitate or rage.” The mariners, from the Hebrew word for “salt,” denoting the quality of the water they navigate, were afraid and prayed to their pagan gods (v. 5). Men have a great fear of death (Heb. 2:15). Inventions of their own darkened minds, their gods could not deliver them from the power of the Almighty. Their only hope at the time was to lighten the ship that it might better ride the terrible tempest.

Exhausted physically and mentally by his flight from God, conscience, and responsibility, Jonah was fast asleep where he had laid himself in the hold of the ship. There he was discovered by the shipmaster, or captain (literally, the “chief of the ropemen”). Then the pagan severely rebuked the prophet for his seeming indifference to their perilous plight. He exhorted Jonah, “Arise, call upon thy God...that we perish not” (v. 6). In his desperation, the captain was ready to try any god, even the God of the Israelites, in order to be delivered from the dangers of the storm.

Deserter Detected—Verses 7-10

Believing that someone on board had evidently angered the gods, the crew “cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah” (v. 7). God, on occasion, guided His people through this means of selecting people for some task or position (cf. Prov. 16:33; Josh. 7:14; 1 Sam. 10:20-21; Acts 1:26). So, here, God directs the lot to Jonah. He directs us today through His completed revelation (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We may know of a certainty that our disobedience will eventually be discovered. If not by man, it will be exposed by God. Our sins will find us out (Num. 32:23; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). Jonah is thoroughly interrogated with several questions to learn his identity and business (v. 8). To his credit, he did not lie to these men. But greater fear seized them when they learned that this Hebrew was a deserter from a Divine

mission of (v. 9) the Lord God, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and dry land. The mariners were then “exceedingly afraid” (v. 10).

Distressing Determination—Verses 11-16

The sailors cried, “What shall we do...that the sea may be calm?” (v. 11). The patience and fairness of these men is truly astounding as they discover that they faced grave danger as a result of dereliction of duty by this deserter who was under sentence of Divine wrath. Truly, no man lives unto himself. Our response to God, whatever it be, will affect others. Jonah recognizes that others are in grave peril because of him: “Take me up and cast me into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you” (v. 12). Thus, as a prophet who begins to see the need of his own penitence, he turns himself over to the Divine will. He was willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others, even pagan sailors. So he stands as a type of Messiah, Who was willing, as the one qualified individual, to sacrifice Himself to deliver sinful man from the stormy flood of God’s wrath that will eventually inundate the disobedient (Rom. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). Better that one man die than that all should perish (cf. John 11:50). Perhaps fearful of putting Jehovah’s prophet to death, they dug deeper with their oars to bring the ship to land but could not (v. 13). The storm grew fiercer. What a paradox—Gentiles trying to save the life of a prophet who had refused to save the multiplied lives of an entire Gentile city! In fervent prayer to the true and living God, these men did not want to be held accountable for the death of Jonah (v. 14). When all else had failed, they cast Jonah overboard and the stormy sea immediately subsided (v. 15). Awe-stricken, the sailors “offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made vows” (v. 16). Thus, they showed more sensitivity to the situation than God’s own chosen people often did.

Repentance: The Prophet's Prayer and Preservation (1:17-2:10)

Prepared Punishment—1:17

The Lord had prepared (or appointed) a great fish (Hebrew **dag gadol**) to swallow up Jonah. Even in chastisement, Jonah is not forgotten by God. Though this might not appear to be an act of loving correction, the fish was God's means of transporting Jonah safely to shore. The God Who created all things would have no problem in controlling a regular fish or in preparing a special one for this task. God's direction of this creature would prove no challenge for the One Who caused the animals to obey Noah and board the ark. "Whale" (Greek **ketos**) is too specific in translation in the New Testament. While "whale" would not be excluded, the word simply denotes a huge fish or sea-monster.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. There is nothing miraculous in being swallowed alive and whole by a great fish; but that Jonah could continue alive and well in the fish for three days and then be delivered up to continue on God's mission is a matter of Divine power. Christ repeatedly referred to "the sign (or miracle, PH) of the prophet Jonah" (Matt. 12:39-40; 16:4). Jonah, the type, like the great Antitype, Christ, out of the belly of "Sheol," the unseen abode, was delivered, or resurrected, to continue the Divinely commissioned journey. From Christ's reference to this event, it is easy to see that He proclaimed the reality of Jonah's experience.

The period in the fish, as well as Jesus' stay in the tomb, could be a literal seventy-two hour period. This would be more in keeping with our usage of the expression "three days and three nights." The Hebrews, however, used such expressions to also refer to that which would include but parts of the first and third twenty-four hour days.

Penitent Prayer—2:1-9

“Then Jonah prayed” (v. 1). All men would pray in such a desperate situation. There are no atheists in foxholes or the bellies of great fish. Jonah was not now asleep. God had his undivided attention. Someone has pointed out that all looked dark to Jonah. But things always look dark in the belly of a “whale,” when we are fleeing from our duty.

Jonah’s fervent thoughts while in the fish, and later written down, show a great familiarity with the Psalms (v. 2). His cry unto God was by reason of affliction. Such mutual affliction as experienced by the psalmist motivated Jonah also. Sensing that he was being preserved by the Lord, he also offered thanksgiving and praise. God heard his voice out of the belly of hell—Sheol, the unseen intermediate state, which the belly of the fish resembled. Now, instead of fleeing from God, he flees to God.

The hands of the mariners became the hands of God to (v. 3) cast Jonah into the deep. It was God-controlled floods, billows, and waves that had passed over him. Jonah understood why he had been chastised and recognized the justice of God’s dealing with him. Jonah believed also in God’s mercy that would enable him to pray toward the holy temple and even worship before Him in His temple (v. 4).

Describing graphically the extremity of his situation even farther, he noted that the weeds were wrapped about his head (v. 5). Seaweeds also made up the content of the fish’s stomach. Jonah was transported “down to the bottom of the mountains” (v. 6). Descending to the sea floor, the great fish carried him to the hidden depths where man could not survive on his own. Shut away from the land surface, only God could bring up his life from corruption or the pit. When his soul was about to sink in the night of death, Jonah remembered the Lord in prayer, and it

reached to God in His holy temple (v. 7). Prayed in the lowest depths, his prayer was heard in the highest heavens.

Jonah gave warning concerning “lying vanities” (v. 8). Those that worship pagan gods, as the mariners did, cut themselves off from the only source of mercy—God Himself. He does not tolerate the idols or gods of man (Exod. 20:3-6; Psm. 31:6). In contrast to the above, Jonah recognized that “salvation is of the Lord” (v. 9). Therefore he will offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and pay that which he has vowed to God.

Divine Deliverance—2:10

“And the Lord spake unto the fish” (v. 10). In what way God spoke to the fish we are not told. It is apparent that, if there is Divine need, the instinct of beasts can be controlled by the will of God. This may be done through angels, as in the case of the hungry lions whose mouths were shut, when otherwise they would have devoured Daniel (Dan. 6:22). God’s secret power cannot be fathomed by man: “And it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” We do not know whether this was near Joppa or further up the coast. So, by Divine miracle, Jonah, the messenger, was resurrected from the sea creature to become the type of Him, the Messiah, Who, upon the third day, was resurrected from the grave for our salvation.

Renewal: The Prophet Preaches (3:1-10)

Second Summons—Verses 1-2

The Lord the second time commissions the reluctant prophet to go unto Nineveh. After Jonah had been punished for his disobedience and miraculously delivered from death by the mercy of God, he is given the opportunity to preach unto it the preaching that God had bidden him in the first place. How we all should rejoice that God is the God of the

second chance, as He patiently bears with us in His love (1 Cor. 13:4, 7). Despite Jonah's initial rebellion, God had not given up on him and was able to bring him to repentance (cf. Matt. 21:28-29). As Jonah, we must not fail God again and again in our proclamation of His will. Nor are we allowed to preach just anything. God's authority restricts us to His message only (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11). God's message is the only message that will accomplish God's will.

Declaring Destruction—Verses 3-4

"Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh" (v. 3). This city is described as an exceeding, great city of three days' journey (cf. Gen. 10:11-12). Scholars have differed as to the size of Nineveh. Most believe that this description included all the metropolitan suburbs of Nineveh, which included several dependent communities. It had been a dominant city-state from ancient times and was located on the east bank of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia, about five hundred miles from Palestine. Circumference estimates of the metropolitan area have varied from fifty-five up to ninety miles in the sources checked by this writer.

A day's journey carried Jonah into the city with the message, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (v. 4). Jonah's declaration was brief and seemed unconditional. But such was not the case. God, in His eternal nature, did not desire their destruction but their repentance (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). This is seen in that the destruction was not immediate but delayed for forty days. There would be time to repent. Another prophet, Jeremiah, at a later time, spoke of the conditional principle involved:

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation

against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil. I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:7-10).

So we should understand that warnings such as the above are conditional and are dependent upon man's response to God. If Nineveh did not repent, they would become as Sodom and Gomorrah. The verb translated "overthrown" is the same one which is repeatedly used of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:21, 25; Deut. 29:23; et al).

Rapid Repentance—Verses 5-9

The rapid response of the Ninevites is truly amazing (v. 5). It reminds one of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when three thousand Jews were pricked in their hearts and thus moved to repentance and baptism for the remission of their sins. But Nineveh was a pagan city and had not the exposure to God that the Jews had. Nonetheless, they believed God, or rather believed in God, as the phrase is the same as that found in Genesis 15:6. Here it is said of Abraham, that he "believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." Their faith was also active and obedient.

The Lord Jesus said, "For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). Some believe that Jonah's ordeal and deliverance from the sea monster became known to the Ninevites. This knowledge would have made their hearts more receptive to the message of Jonah, just as miracles confirmed the word in New Testament times (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:4). Such would not be impossible, for pagan Rahab's knowledge of God's

miraculous powers in leading Israel from Egyptian bondage led to her faith in God and in Israel's future (Josh. 2:9-11). Whatever the case, their repentance was genuine. Jesus declared, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). The incarnate God, Who knows the hearts of all men, would be qualified to judge the genuineness of Nineveh's repentance and the failure of His own generation, who had far greater light and privilege. The Ninevites "proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth"; so great was the impression of Jonah's message of God's wrath against Nineveh that the king arose and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes (v. 6). Sackcloth, a garment of haircloth, was a material that was very rough and scratched against the body, worn as a symbol of humbling oneself. As a mourning costume, it reaches far back into the patriarchal age (cf. Gen. 37:34; Job 16:15). Sitting in ashes denoted the deepest sorrow and humiliation (Job 2:8; Ezek. 27:30). Many nations used such expressions as symbols of sorrow.

Through the proclamation of the king, a fast was decreed that "neither man nor beast, herd nor flock...not feed, nor drink water" (v. 7). In ancient times, with the death of a monarch or some other great calamity, animals were included in the denial of food and drink, according to Herodotus (IX, 24). The lowing and groaning of deprived animals was mingled with the sorrow and sobs of men as they implored God (cf. Joel 1:20).

The king and his nobles exhorted all Ninevites to **turn everyone from their evil ways, and from the violence that characterized them** (v. 8). The symbols of their repentance were apparent. Now it was time to bring forth the fruits of said repentance. A change of

mind must always bring forth a change of life (cf. Matt. 3:8). It was a fact that Nineveh must repent or perish.

Hope was still alive in the heart of the king. It was a hope that the people would change their ways, and, consequently, God would change His mind with regard to their destruction: “Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” (v. 9). These pagans believed that God’s greatest desire was not to destroy men but to save them. On man’s part, the king did not want to leave anything to chance. He sought to encourage the necessary change. Only then could destruction be replaced by deliverance.

Marvelous Mercy—Verse 10

When “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way,” His marvelous mercy was extended to them (v. 10). When their faith in God led to repentance and brought forth the fruits thereof, their relationship to sin and God’s righteousness was altered. So God would deal with them accordingly. It is a part of God’s immutable character to be merciful to the penitent and to take vengeance at last on the hardened impenitent (Exod. 34:6-7). Abraham, a thousand years before, understood God’s nature in these matters when he declared:

That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Gen. 18:25).

We have already viewed this truth in Jeremiah 18:7-10, but we also invite the reader to examine Ezekiel 18:21-25 to further consider God’s immutable dealing with the righteous and the unrighteous, the penitent and impenitent. Since this is a part of God’s unchanging nature,

it would be true not only in His dealings with Israel, but with any nation that so responded to His call to them for repentance. Again, we see another practical demonstration that man's works of faith, coupled with God's grace, bring God's deliverance.

God's repentance and the evil that He said that He would do have nothing to do with sin upon God's part. God cannot do evil in the sense of violating His own will (Jas. 1:13); thus, there is no need of repentance from sin on His part. The evil here spoken of is the punishment He promised Nineveh if she did not turn from her wickedness. When she did, God changed His mind (repented) with regard to Nineveh's destruction.

Resentment: The Prophet Pouts (4:1-11)

Despairing Displeasure—Verses 1-4

The reluctant prophet had finally obeyed God in going to Nineveh and preaching God's message, but the hate of his heart had not changed to a redemptive love for these penitent sinners of Nineveh. Too, his narrow, selfish pride and patriotism as an Israelite had blinded his mind to the need to be compassionate to another nation. This was true even though he realized that God would be willing to forgive them, as a Being that could not be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35).

Jonah's exceeding vexation and irritation grew to the point that he was "very angry," or "hot within," as denoted by the Hebrew (v. 1). He burned with resentment toward God! How dangerous on the part of Jonah! He perhaps resented the fact that he had been forced to be the means of saving a city which the Lord had been on the very verge of destroying—a city that Jonah wanted destroyed. How like Christ's disciples, who knew not what manner of spirit

they were of, when they wanted to bring down fire from heaven upon a village of the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56)!

With his heart hot within him, he spoke unadvisedly with his lips “as he prayed unto the Lord” (v. 2). What a different prayer from that offered from the belly of the sea monster!

“O Lord, was not this my saying...in my country” (v. 2). Though he does not vocalize what his saying was back in Palestine before he fled God, from what follows, it is apparent that he expressed to himself that he believed God would forgive Nineveh if they repented. He did not want to go and preach to them because he knew God was “gracious...merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (v. 2). So the real reason of Jonah’s flight to Tarshish is out in the open as he seeks to justify himself and to quarrel with God.

“O Lord, take...my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live” (v. 3) This brings to mind the prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4, but from a very opposite motive. Elijah despaired of life because he felt he had failed the Lord in his labors and was the only faithful servant left in Israel. Jonah despaired of life because he had been successful in carrying out the Lord’s commission, a commission he did not want to succeed. Jonah’s philosophy was, “If Nineveh must live, let me die.” It reminds one of more recent sentiment on the part of some: “If I have to be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, I had rather go to hell!”

Jonah has gone from being the prodigal who fled to the far country to being the elder brother who could not rejoice in the repentance of the erring. When God might well have struck him dead because of his attitude, anger and prayer, He only gently and patiently chides Jonah “Dost thou well to be angry?” (v. 4). How desperately Jonah needed to repent himself and come to his senses!

Persistent Passion—Verse 5

Perhaps miffed at God's question, the pouting prophet, with a persistent passion for Nineveh's destruction, "went out...and sat on the east side of the city" (v. 5). Here he built a booth to protect himself from the blazing sun and to wait till he might see what would become of the city. Maybe the penitence of Nineveh might yet fail and the Lord would be forced to change His mind.

God's Gourd—Verses 6-9

The God of all creation, Who had caused a stormy sea, provided a great fish, and preserved the prophet in order to preach, now miraculously provides a gourd to soothe Jonah's spirit from its grief and to teach him a lesson (v. 6). Various conjectures have been made as to what type of plant this was, but it does not serve our purpose to enter into this discussion. What a paradox: a small plant designed by God for one man's protection could bring such joyful gladness to the heart of Jonah, while the sparing of a great city could bring such agonizing anger. Jonah's joy was not to last long.

"But God prepared a worm to smite the gourd that it withered...and when the sun arose...God prepared a vehement east wind" (vv. 7-8). This sultry wind and the sun "beat upon the head of Jonah so that he fainted" (v. 8). He again wished himself dead. For a few joyous moments his mind had fastened upon his protection from the elements, only to return to his state of anger over the withered gourd and a spared city. In verse nine, Jonah, for the second time, seeks to justify his great anger before God, even unto death. How sad that Jonah was so slow to understand his precarious position!

Lasting Lessons—Verses 10-11

The Lord speaks to Jonah for the last time within this book and brings to all of us age-lasting lessons. Jonah

had had pity on a small withered plant, a gourd that he had not planted, cared for, nor caused to grow. It “came up in a night (Hebrew “the son of a night,” PH), and perished in a night” (v. 10). He could be so disturbed by such a small matter but not be disturbed a moment about the destruction of a city of 600,000 people, 120,000 of which were innocent children. He could complain about a small inconvenience of personal discomfort and at the same time rejoice in the prospect of a whole city’s destruction, to say nothing of many cattle. Even dumb animals are of greater value to God than Jonah’s withered weed, a small, insignificant plant, which today, even if not destroyed by the worm, would soon have been cast into the oven of tomorrow. The lilies of the field, which are more richly adorned than Solomon himself, were declared by Christ to be of far lesser value than the bodies and souls of men who are designed by God’s special creation to live forever (Matt. 6:28-30). In fact, Jesus declared that one soul is worth more than the whole world (16:26). One Ninevite would have been of far more value than a trillion gourd plants. Not even a sparrow falls that our Father doesn’t take note of in His love and concern, and a man is of much greater value than many sparrows (10:29-31).

“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?” (v. 11). Yea, verily! We wonder, in the light of the above, how the creeds of men could conceive that small children, who are so unlearned as to not know their right from their left hand, are damned because they supposedly inherit sin. Children who cannot discern the right hand from the left cannot discern between good and evil, and are not yet accountable. Neither is it possible for them to inherit sin. God declares again and again their innocence (cf. Ezek. 18:4, 20; Matt. 18:1-4; 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:14; 1 Cor. 14:20).

So, as the book so abruptly closes, we are left with momentous impact. There can be no doubt that, as a nation and city, Assyria and Nineveh were later destroyed by God because they lapsed back into their wickedness (Isa. 10:24-25; Nah. 1:1-8; 2:13-3:19). Assyria was destroyed in 612 B.C. by the Babylonian Nabopolassar. But Jonah and Israel, if they learned their lesson, would have to realize their narrow exclusivity was not of God. God was concerned for all men of all nations and could extend grace upon His own righteous and sovereign conditions at anytime He chose. Today, while we must zealously uphold Divinely revealed kingdom laws of inclusion and exclusion, we must not allow ourselves to develop a narrow, sectarian spirit that shuts out all Gentiles who lived from the time of the covenant made with Israel unto the cross. This interpretation is to imbibe the spirit of Jonah, Israel, and the Pharisees of Jesus' day. It is to ignore the fact that God did work with and through others not of Israel. It is highly probable that God showed His love and concern for others much more than the few, brief glimpses we gain from the Old Testament.

It is the conviction of this writer that the patriarchal law did not end at Mount Sinai, as some of our cottage class charts and current theology suggests, but rather at the cross. If this is not the case, it means that the Gentiles were helplessly lost in every way from God's favor and that, for fifteen hundred years, He was a respecter of persons. We believe it contrary to God's nature to provide no way of salvation for any individual arbitrarily. The whole attitude of God toward the possibility of Nineveh's repentance, and the mission of Jonah, becomes absurd. Ephesians 2:12 described the Ephesians' condition prior to their conversion to Christ. Their being without "hope, and without God" was not due to their arbitrary rejection by God, but because the Gentiles, out of their own volition,

had rejected the patriarchy, God's law for them. A knowledge of God had been lost by them through the centuries. We must beware, lest we, like Jonah, seek to tell God what He can and cannot do.

Whatever other lessons can be learned from Jonah, let us remember that we must carry out the worldwide commission now ours. As always, God's love for man is universal, and He desires that all men come to repentance. All men must be made to realize that a greater than Jonah is here, and Nineveh will arise in the judgment to condemn any generation that does not repent!

CHAPTER 16

Great Lessons From The Book Of Jonah

Paul Kidwell, Sr.

Introduction

JONAH IS A MODEL for preaching in the Old Testament. In unique fashion he goes to a “heathen” nation to preach repentance. Jesus spoke of his success:

The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here (Matt. 12:41).

To make the story of Jonah into an “allegory” violates Scripture and common sense. There was a man named Jonah. In 2 Kings 14:25 the record says:

He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai the prophet who was from Gath-hepher.

The first verse of the book of Jonah says, “And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai.”

Jesus spoke of Jonah on different occasions during His personal ministry. These occasions are found in Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30, 32. Jonah is not

an imaginary figure. The book is no “fish tale.” The record is true. Jonah is real! This study is my favorite approach to the book. Through nearly forty years of preaching, I have preached on Jonah on more than one hundred occasions. This outline for “Running With God” came from the **Dickson Master Bible** (J. Wesley Dickson, pp. 966-967), given to me when I entered Freed-Hardeman University in 1951 by my father, C. T. Kidwell (1902-1988), Gospel preacher for fifty-five years. Though different approaches to a study of the book have been made, I always come back to this “favorite.” The outline for this study is simple. Each chapter is given a descriptive title, and the outline is done:

1. Chapter one—running from God;
2. Chapter two—running to God;
3. Chapter three—running with God;
4. Chapter four—running ahead of God.

Running From God (Chapter One)

The book begins with a commission.

Jonah, son of Amittai, was told where to go and what to preach. He was told, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh, capital of Assyria, was an abomination to Jehovah. The city had a reputation for extreme violence. God gave Jonah a charge. “Go, cry against it,” the prophet was told. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. He may have feared for his life. The people of Nineveh might kill him if he preached against their sin! Then, too, as we shall see in chapter four, Jonah just did not care about the salvation of Nineveh. It would please him if Jehovah simply destroyed that wicked people with no warning. Today, many preachers are not preaching the message of the Master. Some do not preach what is needed because their primary concern is the comfort and well-being of “me and mine, us four, no more.” It is possible for

a man to preach the Truth every time he enters the pulpit and still be lost and take a congregation to hell with him because he fails to preach to the needs of the people. Nineveh was a wicked city. Their need was not constructive preaching on interpersonal relationships and “how to succeed by smiling,” but rather they needed to have someone “**cry against**” their wickedness. God knew their need. He knows the need today. The world must have prophets who will cry aloud and spare not. Preacher training efforts, including our colleges and our schools of preaching, should emphasize the need for such. We don’t need more priests to minister in the sanctuary. We need prophets who will warn against sin of every stripe and kind.

Jonah Did Not Want To Preach What God Said Preach

He decided he would **run from God**. Observe his actions. He went “down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish” (1:2). “Down” is literally true, geographically and spiritually. Every step away from God is a step “down.” Hell is downhill from where we stand. Jonah “found” a ship. He had already made up his mind to go to Tarshish, rather than Nineveh. When we decide to go to the “far country,” we may be sure the devil will see to our having a “boat,” docked and ready to take us away. Don’t blame the ship nor even the ship’s owner. If God wants to charge the cab driver, that is His prerogative. If one is in the “wrong crowd,” don’t blame the crowd. If he did not “fit” in the crowd, he would remove himself from the same, or the crowd would remove him!

The text says Jonah “paid his fare” (1:3, emp. mine throughout, PK). Learn this lesson. If you will dance, you must pay the fiddler! If you ride the devil’s boat, you will pay his charged fare (Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:8). Some believe they can clutch the fire of sin to their bosom without being

burned. Sin costs! Strong drink enslaves! The man takes a drink. The drink takes a drink. The drink takes a man. “Look not on the wine,” God warns. Lust enslaves. In his final stage of depravity, man is described as “Having eyes full of adultery (an adulteress, margin, PK) and that cannot cease from sin” (2 Pet. 2:14).

On occasion parents have said of their young, “They must sow their wild oats.” Just remember, wild oats need no fertilizer. Sin is not something we can play with and then lay down. Sin breaks hearts, homes, and lives. Sin destroys. You will pay a terrible price for any pleasures of sin. Defiled conscience, lost self-confidence, reputation and soul—these are the results of sin. We must learn to hate sin.

Preachers who can make a mockery of their job by deliberately avoiding “touchy issues” and the sins of the brethren are miserable failures. Just as the modernist who really does not believe in the supernatural is stealing his salary when he “preaches” to those who need the Gospel, so the featherbedding hireling who fails to preach what God wants preached is equally dishonest. Some say, “Don’t lose your job by preaching on sin.” We would respond, “Don’t lose your soul, and the souls of your hearers by failing to preach the truth in love!” Love won’t let you leave the souls you touch in sin headed for hell. Don’t tell me you love them and thus you want to “spare” them in your preaching. My best friend and the one who loves me most is he who will help me go to heaven.

Jonah did not care for the people of Nineveh. He was selfish. How about you, preacher? Run from God? Where will you go? Jonah struck out for Nineveh. He hid in the lower decks of the ship. He was asleep when the tempest arose. There is a storm brewing for all in sin. “The rebellious dwell in a dry land,” says Jeremiah. The far country has a hog pen as the motel of sinners (Luke 15).

When “the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest...the mariners were afraid” (Jonah 1:4-5).

The ship’s cargo is cast overboard. Sleepy Jonah is awakened. Lots are cast. Jonah, the “jinx,” is uncovered: “Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? And whence cometh thou? what is thy country? And of what people art thou?” (1:8). Be sure your sins will find you out! Jonah confesses! He responds to their questions by telling them they must cast him overboard if the ship is to be saved.

The sinner exposed knows that discipline should be administered. When churches begin to act against sin, the respect of the world may be reclaimed. Presently, there are too many members of the body whose lives do not adorn the doctrine of God for the ship of Zion to have much chance of succeeding in reaching the lost. How are we different? Men and women of the world drink their booze; revel in their lust on the dance floor, in the movies they watch, on television, and at the beach; talk and act in “sophisticated” fashion; and generally despise regulated conduct. **Too many members of the body of Christ are living in this fashion.** The preachers are “ministering in the sanctuary,” and the elders are busy counting the money to see if the bills can be paid and a new play area developed. Hell sizzles!

On board the ship “headed for Tarshish,” a business meeting is held. Jonah, farepaying, rather likable, quiet little man, must be spared. After all, “If we keep running off those who pay the ‘fare,’ how will we make ends meet?” And so, the mariners return to their oars. We will make it work! Read it and weep: “But they could not” (1:13).

A primary concern with nickels and noses will lead preachers and congregations to neglect the work of

preaching the Gospel. Having the members leave services “feeling good” is not always right. The sinner should feel terrible! Preaching which allows the rebellious to continue fighting against and running from God is not faithful Gospel preaching. Those who engage in such place their souls and those who listen to them in danger of destruction.

Running To God (Chapter Two)

Strange Schoolhouse, That Fish

But in it, Jonah will learn the lesson of his life! Jonah prays (2:1). Jonah cries (2:2). Jonah thought he was a “goner”: “Out of the belly of hell (margin, “grave,” PK) cried I, and thou heardest my voice” (2:2). Jonah “remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple” (2:7).

Many cries come from fox holes! Hospital prayers ascend regularly! “Rip-cord religion” is **in**! Death bed requests, to Gospel preachers, seldom concern counting money. We are not asked to evaluate stocks held. Houses and barns are not most important. Regrettably, many promises made in “jeopardy” are forgotten when the sunshine returns!

God Hears Jonah

Jonah has realized where salvation is found. The mariners have cried to “their gods.” Jonah concludes:

They that observe **lying vanities (“Those who regard worthless idols” NKJV)** forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord (2:8-9).

Just as the prodigal is swiftly in the “far country” once his decision is made, so Jonah is quickly in the ship headed for Tarshish. Too, when the prodigal “came to

himself” he was soon delivered from the hog pen and was again home with the father. In Jonah’s case, though the three days must have seemed eternal, he was soon back on dry ground (2:10).

Running With God (Chapter Three)

A Simple Plan—Work It!

Jonah hit the ground running! God said, “go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you” (3:2). The success of God’s people in evangelism during the age just past was primarily because emphasis was placed on the message. We have moved uptown! We have buildings comparable to any the denominations have. We are affluent. We are on the “right” side of the tracks. We are educated. We are proud. We are selfish. We are spending our money and efforts in a constant struggle to provide more creature comforts for “our people.” We can build gymnasiums and justify them as “multi-purpose buildings,” but we can’t find funds for preaching the Gospel to the lost. We can build Olympic-size “multi-purpose baptismal pools” while allowing a lost world to beat a path to hell! We have decided we can reach more people with hot dogs and hurrah. We have catapulted the personalities among us into celebrity status. We have our charisma peddlers. We are holding “unity meetings” to allow self-appointed delegates to discuss the limits of our fellowship for us. We have pulpits that are almost completely devoid of Scripture. Too often the message is sanctified psychology. The egotistical hireling believes it is “his” pulpit, and he doesn’t want any troubled waters. The watered-down message troubles no one. He will “bore” none in his audience by simple preaching. He refuses to “turn off” his hearers by quoting Scripture!

All These Trappings, And We Are Failing

Wake up, preachers! Chapter three is the success story of all time. Jonah preaches God's message. The seed is sown. God gives the increase. Six hundred thousand people are spared the destruction that was imminent at the beginning of Jonah's work. In a mission program of less than two months duration, Jonah has a response of great magnitude. God is not dependent upon our imaginations! The need is for dedication, rather than innovation. Integrity, rather than ingenuity, is needed. Faithfulness must take the place of "fluff." Thirty years ago, we were the fastest growing religious group in the U.S. Our present growth rate is pitiful. We are "shifting." Super churches may boast of growing, but close observation indicates great numbers are being attracted from sister congregations. There is a mass migration from the "dying" inner city church to the affluent super church located in the best part of town. This feeds the ego of the "super preacher" who is proud of his "super church." John Doe, church member, believes the numbers he sees around him argue for apparent success. Yet we are failing. We have less emphasis on mission work than at any time in my lifetime. Two preachers on a recent training for service series, without knowledge of the comments of the other, said the same thing. These men would make most lists of prominent preachers of today. They said, "Mission work is **out**!" One eldership was quoted as having said, "Mission work is not a saleable commodity." If we don't have as our first priority the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, we have lost it. Why should we exist, if not to carry the Gospel to the lost? Maybe the Lord needs to "whale" all of us today!

Running Ahead Of God (Chapter Four)

What God wants is not pleasing to Jonah. So what if the city of Nineveh is spared? There is no personal glory

in this result for Jonah. He doesn't care what is done in Nineveh. He wants the glory of his home land. If Jonah were preaching today in America, he would want a plush pulpit with all the "fringe benefits." He would have no concern for carrying the Gospel outside the reaches of his own "parish." Only those efforts in evangelism would receive his support which could reflect credit to the local work. Contribute to nothing which we do not control! Only those works under "our oversight" should be considered. I believe I read this same philosophy in the mind of Jonah. While he sits on the hill overlooking Nineveh, he prays to the Lord. His prayer is unbelievable. He prays:

O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil (4:2).

Incredible! Here is a man who is disappointed with success. Six hundred thousand people saved, and Jonah is displeased! His littleness is exposed. God replaces his homemade shelter with a natural shade. The gourd comes up in a night. Jonah "was exceeding glad for the gourd" (4:6), "but God prepared a worm" (4:7). The next day reveals the destruction of Jonah's air conditioning system. The gourd is gone. Jonah's lamentation is heard. God shames him:

You care for a gourd which came and went overnight, and you aren't concerned with a city wherein are one hundred twenty thousand people who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle (4:10).

How often God must look with disdain at our warped values! We are concerned with things. We want possessions. Churches want bank accounts. Preachers want benefits. A

world is **lost**! Does anyone really care? See our new buildings? Look at our pedigrees! Watch our progress! Count our numbers! Don't bother us with sad stories about lost souls. Let us alone as we enjoy practicing our religion. "Jonah, Jonah," don't you see what is really important to Jehovah? Why mention the cattle? I don't know. Perhaps God wanted this detail included, so selfish souls of every age could see something worth sparing in Nineveh. Is this all we see?

CHAPTER 17

Introduction To The Book Of Micah

J. K. Gossett

THIS INTRODUCTION TO *MICAH* will consist of two parts. First, a general introduction will be given, showing the place of Micah in the Old Testament era. Second, a more specific introduction will be presented dealing with the content, time, and events of the book.

A General Introduction

It is good to focus upon the prophets of ancient Israel, particularly the minor ones, the ones most likely to be overlooked and neglected. The casual student of the Bible probably would recognize Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, but many could not readily find Habakkuk, Zephaniah, or Obadiah without an index of the Bible.

The book of Micah, which is really the basis of this introductory treatise, is classified among those prophets called minor and, in the list of the twelve so designated, is number six in the Old Testament lineup, following Jonah and preceding Nahum. This is not necessarily the chronological order. Perhaps it would be helpful to say that Micah prophesied after Samuel, Elijah, Jonah, and Joel, and that he was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. He was followed by Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel.

In the game which has been called the nation's pastime, there are major and minor leagues, and, of course, major and minor league players. Most Americans would recognize the names of Musial, Aaron, DiMaggio, Ruth, and Mantle because they all played very successfully in the major leagues. However, the names of countless minor league players are unknown. Mickey Stubblefield, when I was growing up, was a pitcher for the Kitty League Team in Mayfield, KY. So far as I know, he never made it to the major leagues. Mickey and Mantle were in different leagues. Conversely, the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament were all in the same "league."

The minor prophets were the contemporaries and colleagues of the major prophets and had equal authority. Peter wrote, "For the prophecy (all prophecy, JG) came not in old time by the will of man but holy men of God (major and minor prophets, JG) spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21).

The terms major and minor were not Divinely given, nor do these words suggest relative importance. Some prophetic books of the Old Testament are rather lengthy, and others very brief: hence, major and minor.

The book of Micah has 105 verses which are distributed over seven chapters, the whole book being shorter than Psalm 119. However, it should be kept in mind that the length of a book is not the measure of the prophet who gave it his name, nor is it a gauge to assess the merits of the message. Certainly, the teaching of Micah is as authoritative as any of the major prophets, since he and they spake and wrote by the same Spirit.

It is helpful to remember, when studying the Old Testament, that the nation of Israel had three institutions—the priesthood, the throne, and the office of the prophet—which gave form and substance, direction and meaning to its national existence. The priesthood was

set up at Mt. Sinai in connection with the Law and the tabernacle. Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron, was designated the priestly tribe. The work of the priests was centered in the tabernacle of Moses and later the temple of Jerusalem. Their duties consisted of burning incense, offering sacrifices, conducting the services of the temple, and teaching. The office of the priest was received by inheritance, and it was centralized. In the sacrifices offered by the priests, the people spoke to God. In contrast, when the prophet did his work, God spoke through him to the people.

The second institution of Israel was the throne, which was occupied first by Saul, then David, then Solomon. With the division of Israel, there were two centers of power and two lines of kings. Some of these kings were very evil, while some made efforts towards reform, but they all, whether good or evil, were certainly a strong influence in Israel because of their control of the wealth, military power, and general influence. Also it should be remembered that Israel was a theocratic nation.

The third and most powerful influence among God's ancient people was through the prophets. Several things caused this to be the case. (1) The prophet's authority came directly from God. (2) The prophets were independent, neither power-based (as the kings), nor dependent on their ancestors for position (as the priests). (3) They were not motivated by economic or military considerations, as the priests and kings sometimes were. (4) Their work is a classic example of words and ideals, faith and dedication over worldly power. (5) And, yes, there was power in God's Word as spoken by the prophets, power to direct the Messianic nation to its ultimate destiny of bringing the Christ into the world. Micah and his inspired teaching were powerful links in the chain of events which brought to fruition the eternal purpose of God, the coming of Christ, the establishment of the church, the preaching of the Gospel, and the salvation that is in Christ.

A More Specific Introduction To Micah

The Source Of The Book

This book bears the name of Micah but its author is the Lord. “The word of the Lord that came to Micah” is the opening statement of this prophecy. Many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament open in this fashion. Some examples are: “The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea...the beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea” (Hos. 1:1-2); “The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel” (Joel 1:1); “Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah” (Jonah 1:1); “The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah” (Zeph. 1:1). These statements are truly significant. They declare the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. What is said in the New Testament of these Scriptures is in perfect agreement with the Old Testament claim. Peter wrote, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). Micah wrote, “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment and of might to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8).

It should be emphasized that the Word of the Lord came to Micah. He was simply the messenger. Paul wrote in the New Testament:

But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12).

Concerning the Lord’s supper, Paul wrote, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (1 Cor 11:23). The Bible then is truly the Word of God. It was revealed to men for men.

The Time Of Micah

The Lord's Word was revealed to Micah "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." These kings were father, son, and grandson, in the order named. Jotham reigned sixteen years, Ahaz reigned sixteen years, and Hezekiah ruled twenty-nine years. Isaiah and Hosea were also prophesying during this time (Hos. 1:1; Isa. 1:1).

What these kings did and the way they ruled enable us to appreciate the circumstances under which Micah lived and prophesied. Jotham was one of the better kings of Judah as the following accounts indicate:

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did...so Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God (2 Chron. 27:2, 6).

Howbeit the high places were not removed; the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord (2 Kings 15:35).

From the relatively good reign of Jotham, we turn to the evil reign of Ahaz, who must have been a "thorn in the side" of Micah:

But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills under every green tree...and Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasurers of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria (16:3-8).

The third king to reign during the time when Micah prophesied was Hezekiah, a rather remarkable king, as the following words indicate:

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him (18:3-5).

It will also be remembered that Hezekiah was the king whose life the Lord extended fifteen years (20:1-7; Isa. 38:5).

The throne was a mixed blessing in the days of Micah. At times it was supportive of truth and righteousness; at other times wickedness was actually encouraged. But, regardless of who was on the throne, it seems that Israel was never totally free of idolatry and the sins that accompanied it. It was under these circumstances that Micah prophesied.

The Lord's Revelation to Micah was concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

The above fact is stated in the first verse of the book (i.e., "The word of the Lord...which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem"). Israel was a divided nation at this time. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom; Jerusalem was the capital of Judah and also the site of the temple. While the people of God were divided geographically, the Word of God cannot be similarly divided. Hence, the Word of God was for all the people. In chapter one, verse five, the following questions are asked and answered: "What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?" These capitals were representatives of all the Israelites and are so addressed.

Micah Was A Messianic Prophet

While Isaiah is most often singled out as the Messianic prophet, all of the prophets of fleshly Israel were in reality Messianic—i.e., the work and prophecy of each looked to Christ and the church. Micah and all of his fellow prophets worked to fill the time until Christ should come (Gal. 4:4). Jonah's experience with the whale was prophetic (Jonah 1; Matt. 12:38-40). Daniel predicted the kingdom (Dan. 2:44). And Jeremiah foresaw the new covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8). Micah announced the birthplace of Jesus and, incidentally, was the only prophet to do so (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1-5).

Other Messianic matters are considered in the book before us, including the church and the promise that God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Mic. 4:1-3; 7:20).

Sin, Trouble, Hope And Mercy

Here this I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountains of the house as the high places of the forest (Mic. 3:9-12).

Who is a God like unto thee...because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (7:18-19).

CHAPTER 18

Commentary On The Book Of Micah

Dub McClish

Identity Of Micah

THE FIRST VERSE OF the book of Micah serves as an appropriate outline for introductory details. Micah (an abbreviated form of Micaiah) means “Who is like unto Jehovah”—almost the very question with which the prophet concluded his book (Mic. 7:18). He identified himself as “the Morasthite”—that is, a dweller in Moresbeth, a rural village about twenty-two miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was also known as “Moresbeth-Gath” (1:14), due to its former dependency upon the Philistine city of Gath. He may have identified himself by his home town to distinguish himself from the fearless prophet Micaiah, son of Imlah, who withstood Ahab and his four hundred hired prophets some two centuries earlier (1 Kings 22:8). Although Micah was a man of the country, rather than of the city, this in no way diminished his power as a spokesman for God. We are told nothing of his parents, leading to the conjecture that he was of humble origins. If he had any family, we are not told of it.

Times And Background Of Micah

The Word of the Lord came to Micah “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” From the

beginning of the reign of the first to the end of the last of these successive monarchs spanned approximately 740-687 B.C. A reasonable speculation about the time of Micah's prophetic activity would be from about 740-700 B.C. Although Micah does not so inform us, he was also contemporary with Isaiah, the great Judean prophet (Isa. 1:1), and with Hosea, the prophet of Israel in its last evil days (Hos. 1:1). While Micah lived in Judah, his prophecy concerned both "Samaria and Jerusalem" (i.e., Israel and Judah).

The political background of the time of Micah found the small and weak kingdoms of Israel and Judah between the power-hungry forces of Egypt to their southwest and Assyria and Syria to their north. Jeroboam II (who died about a century before Micah's time—1 Kings 14:23-28), was the last politically strong king of Israel. His successors were a sorry lot who led Israel into increasing wickedness and weakness. Pekah of Israel joined Rezin of Syria to make war against Jerusalem during the reign of Ahaz of Judah (736-716 B.C.). Ahaz appealed to Assyria and received her help. The Assyrians first conquered the Syrian stronghold of Damascus and later (722 B.C.) sacked Samaria and took Israel into captivity as punishment from God for her sins (2 Kings 17:6ff). Assyria placed Judah under tribute in return for its help, but Hezekiah rebelled (18:7), provoking Sennacherib, the Assyrian monarch, to invade Judah and overrun much of its territory (18:13). Next he threatened Jerusalem, causing Hezekiah to petition Jehovah for deliverance. God answered, destroying 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night and causing Sennacherib to return to Nineveh immediately (18:17-19:37). Such were the conditions of terror, political turmoil, and bloodshed during the life of Micah. Some of these events will be seen to be the subject of some of the prophecies of Micah.

The Source Of Micah's Prophecy

This book claims to be “the word of the Lord that came to Micah.” Later in the book he declared, “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8). He was still counted a true prophet a century later (Jer. 26:18) and seven centuries later as well (Matt. 2:6; 10:35-36). He was included in Peter’s explanation of the source of the prophetic writings: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Skeptics and destructive critics, with an **a priori** denial of supernatural predictive prophecy, have long claimed that Micah must be dated later than Micah 1:1 claims, due to the graphic description of the destruction of Samaria (1:6-7). The postulation is that it must have actually been written after Samaria was destroyed (perhaps even in the days of Manasseh, who succeeded Hezekiah) and couched in the future tense, thus making it to appear prophetic. This is as blasphemous as it is absurd. For one thing, this makes a liar and deceiver of Micah. Further, it does not solve any “problem” for the faithless critic. I know of none who are willing to date it after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.) over a century later than Micah, yet he clearly prophesied that catastrophe (3:12), just as he did that of Samaria. If he could accurately foresee the destruction of the capital of Judah some 125-150 years after his time, why should the critics have a problem with his foreseeing the destruction of Israel’s capital by perhaps only eighteen years? An even worse problem for the critic and his denial of true, predictive prophecy is the announcement that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem seven hundred years before it came to pass (5:2; Matt. 2:6)! There is simply no

way of explaining the prophecy of Micah (and that of the other Biblical prophets) apart from the claims they made for their source of information—the Spirit of God.

Miscellaneous Information Relating To The Prophecy Of Micah

There are two graphic Messianic prophecies in Micah. One is the notable declaration of His birthplace (Mic. 5:2-5) and the other is the full description of the establishment, nature, and extent of His kingdom, the church (4:1-3). The almost word-for-word parallels between the last-mentioned passage and Isaiah 2:2-4 are well known. A senseless controversy has long existed concerning which prophet borrowed from the other. The simple truth is that the same Spirit moved both of these men who lived at the same time and addressed the same people to serve as two independent witnesses of this prophecy of surpassing significance. Micah's prophecy of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ was the very passage from which the chief priests and the scribes read when Herod, on behalf of the wise men, asked where the new King was to be born (Matt. 2:1-6).

There are two other passages from Micah (as mentioned above) quoted elsewhere in the Bible. (1) Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem over a century after Micah, and the corrupt priests and prophets in Jerusalem clamored for his death. The elders of the people cautioned them against the evil plan by reminding them that Micah had said the same thing a century earlier, and, instead of killing the prophet, Hezekiah besought God to spare the city, which He did (Jer. 26:11-18). They read from Micah 3:12 on that occasion, and Jeremiah's life was spared. (2) The Lord twice incorporated Micah 7:6 in His words of warning concerning the perils His disciples would encounter (Matt. 10:35-36; Luke 12:52-53).

There are three distinct divisions in the book, provided by Micah himself. Each of them is introduced with the exhortation for the reader to hear the prophetic message. Section one proclaims judgments against both Samaria and Jerusalem (Mic. 1:2-2:13). Section two further denounces the sins of the people but promises the building of the “house of the Lord” and the birth of a new ruler (3:1-5:15). Section three is a description of a “controversy” the Lord has with His people (6:1-7:20). The exposition of Micah will be divided into these three sections.

Exposition Of Micah

Judgments Against Samaria And Jerusalem (1:2-2:13)

Chapter 1:2-5: These verses are for the purpose of arresting the reader’s attention to the judgments which will be uttered. In verse two the whole earth is called upon to hear and learn from the terrible things God will do to Israel and Judah. God’s words of judgment through Micah would testify against all nations in their evils: if God would destroy His own people, what would He do to the nations? God is depicted as coming down out of heaven in wrath with judgments so severe that they are typified by descriptions of earthquake and volcanic eruption (vv. 3-4). “For the transgression of Jacob is all this” tells the cause of these awful judgments (v. 5). “Jacob” likely stands for both nations of the divided kingdom. Samaria (the capital of Israel) and Jerusalem (the capital of Judah) are held accountable as the fountains of wickedness and ruin in the respective nations.

Chapter 1:6-7: These verses prophesy and describe the destruction of Samaria. That of Samaria is first described, just as it would be the first destroyed. The once-proud capital would be leveled, as if prepared for a

vineyard, and the once-stately buildings would be torn down to their foundations (v. 6). Idolatry, the source of God's wrath against her, would be obliterated (v. 7).

Chapter 1:8-9: Here we have a graphic lament over the awful fate of Samaria, which would be destroyed less than twenty years after his prophecy. Micah depicted himself as making the wailing sound of the jackal (ASV) and the mourning sound of the ostrich (ASV) (v. 8). Her spiritual wound or ailment was too grievous to be repaired; it had come to affect even Judah and Jerusalem (v. 9). This may mean the news of the destruction of Samaria had reached Jerusalem or (more probably) that the spiritual disease of idolatry (Israel's incurable wound) had invaded even the holy city of Zion and it too must perish.

Chapter 1:10-16: This section contains a listing of numerous towns and cities in Judah, beginning with the old Philistine stronghold of Gath. Since these cities were in Judean territory (even the doom of Jerusalem is mentioned—v. 12), it seems that, with verse nine, the prophet shifted his emphasis from the destruction of Israel to that of Judah. In some cases Micah indicated the kind of lamentation various cities should make or not make. In others he warned of impending doom. He spoke of responses various cities would make to their calamities. Numerous commentators have pointed out the many paranomasias (i.e., "puns") employed by the prophet in this section. They are lost in the English translations, but a fair sampling of them is seen in James Moffatt's paraphrase of verses ten and eleven: "Tell it not in Telltown (Gath), Weep tears at Tear-town (Bochim), Grovel in the dust at Dust-town (Beth-ophra), Fair stripped, O Fair-town (Saphir)! Stir-town (Zaanán), dares not stir."¹

By the time of Micah, Gath (v. 10) had likely ceased to be an important Philistine city, if it still existed. It is therefore likely that the prophet was using this statement

from David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (uttered some three centuries earlier—2 Sam. 1:20) in a proverbial sense. The intent of the statement, as used both by David and Micah, was to warn against letting God's enemies know of the shame, sorrow, and defeat of His people, lest they gloat.

It may be that this listing of cities traces the route which Sennacherib, the Assyrian, would follow when he assaulted "all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them" (involving Lachish—cf. Mic. 1:13) in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13-14). It also involved a threat against Jerusalem, begun by Sennacherib's generals and later joined by Sennacherib himself (18:17; 19:20-32). God answered Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance and slew 185,000 of the Assyrians encamped against Jerusalem, forcing the heathen king to return to Nineveh empty-handed (19:35-36). This would seem to harmonize with Micah's expression that "evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem" (Mic. 1:12), but not within the city at this time.

While God spared the city this time through Hezekiah's intercession (2 Kings 19:20) and for His own and David's sakes (v. 34), the day would come when those of Jerusalem would make themselves bald in the shame of the captivity into which they would be taken (Mic. 1:16). This is believed to be a reference to the destruction wrought upon the city by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., upon which its survivors were taken into seventy years of Babylonian captivity (2 Chron. 36:11-21).

Chapter 2:1-11: This section describes and denounces some of the oppressions and injustices being perpetrated by the powerful and wealthy in Micah's time, and for which they would eventually pay the penalty of removal from their land. In their covetousness they would lie awake at night, scheming how they could rob others of

their houses, lands, and inheritances (vv. 1-2). While they were devising evil against their fellows, God was devising evil against “this family” (i.e., “the house of Jacob” in v. 7), consisting of a yoke of servitude and humiliation they could in no wise avoid (v. 3; cf. 1:9).

Verse four tells of the retribution in kind of God’s justice, concerning which even their enemies would take up a pretended lamentation. As they had stripped their brethren of their lands, so would others strip theirs and divide it to others. They would no longer possess their measured fields (v. 5). Verse six indicates that there were those among the people (perhaps the rich oppressors and false prophets) who did not want to hear these words of their own destruction. They forbade God’s true prophet to further rebuke them and remind them of their coming woes. Over in Jerusalem, Isaiah was hearing the same thing from the stiff-necked city people:

That this is a rebellious people, lying children,
children that will not hear the law of the Lord.
Which say to the seers, See not; and to the
prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things,
speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:
Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the
path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from
before us (Isa. 30:9-11; cf. Amos 7:10-13).

While the wording in the latter part of verse six is somewhat ambiguous, it appears that Micah is saying that the guilty fold do not want to hear any more such outcries against their sins and promises of doom, lest they be made to feel ashamed. The piercing power of God’s Word is ever present in condemning the guilty. God’s people who are bent on continuing in their wickedness have ever sought to silence those who hold up before them the mirror of Divine revelation. Almost three thousand years ago, worldly members of God’s family were demanding “positive only” preaching and “make us feel good about ourselves” sermons!

In verse seven it appears that some of the evildoers were arguing that Micah's prophecy against them could not be true because the Lord promised good rather than evil to His people. How then could He bring such calamity upon them? Micah's answer is a reminder that such promises of God are ever conditional—they never applied to anyone but the upright. Moses had plainly stated God's conditional promise in his final address:

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known (Deut. 11:26-28).

God's promise of blessings for His people, including eternal salvation, is still conditioned upon faithful obedience: "And being made perfect, he (Christ, DM) became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). Men may chafe at insistence upon obeying the Law of Christ all they choose. They may hurl "legalist" at those who emphasize the importance of keeping the commandments of Christ as loudly as they please. The fact still remains that those do not love Him who disobey Him (John 14:15).

Verses 8 and 9 are intended to quash even the thought of self-justification in the oppressive aristocracy. They were far from being upright (v. 7). Micah recited additional crimes they were committing against those who are defenseless. They were robbing some of the very clothes off their backs and casting women and children out of their homes. These things God willed them to have as His own glorious gifts, but the iniquitous took them away "forever" (i.e., never to be returned or, perhaps, persistently). God

made it plain in Moses' Law that the widow and the orphan were special interests of His care: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child" (Exod. 22:22). The Law of Christ teaches the same: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27).

Verse ten brings yet another promise that their removal from the land would take place. They would one day have to arise and depart. As they had cast the widow and orphan out of their places, so would they be cast out and not be allowed rest. They had polluted the land by their wickedness, and, in its destruction, they would be destroyed as a nation.

Having mentioned the efforts of evil men to squelch the faithful prophet (v. 6), Micah told them in verse eleven the sort of prophet they would accept and support. Their kind of prophet was a liar who would prophesy to them of wine and strong drink, apparently encouraging them to imbibe. It is interesting to note in passing that one thing many brethren clamor for today in preachers is silence concerning and justification for their worldly practices, including drinking of alcoholic beverages. Sadly, many a preacher is now willing to "prophesy" the lie to them that such behavior is perfectly acceptable.

When a people reject the true messenger of God (thus rejecting both God's message and God Himself), they encourage the false prophet. There have always been unscrupulous men and women who would tell people what they wanted to hear for a price, regardless of how big the lie or damnable the heresy. Wicked Ahab had four hundred hired court prophets who were quite willing to say whatever the king wanted to hear (1 Kings 22:6-7). He hated and persecuted Micaiah (perhaps the namesake of Micah), God's true prophet, because "he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (22:8ff).

False prophets abound in the spiritual Israel of the church. Wicked and false brethren readily prefer them and their lies over the Truth. They are being retained and eagerly sought after as preachers and professors and, in many cases, with exorbitant wages, while they spread their toxic teaching. Paul prophesied to Timothy of this very abhorrence of the Truth and lust for error that is now found among us:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

A preference for error over Truth and for the heretic over the faithful messenger of God in God's people today, if persisted in, will bring upon those corrupt brethren the spiritual captivity of sin and excision from the promised eternal inheritance.

Chapter 2:12-13: In the very midst of these prophecies of doom and calamity, Micah issued a hope-filled promise. The general and immediate meaning of these verses is that, although God would cause their enemies to overwhelm and displace them to a strange land, the remnant of them would one day be called forth by God and returned to their land. The particulars of verse twelve involve the following: this promise would involve all of Jacob's descendants being put together once more, thus reuniting Israel and Judah. Bozrah (in Edom), famed for its vast flocks of sheep, indicates large gathering, as does the great noise they would make. "The breaker" (v. 13) is likely descriptive of God, Who would break open the gate of their captors and lead them out, clearing the way as would a king who would "pass before them."

Since the immediate context of chapters one and two prophesies the falls of Samaria to Assyria and of Jerusalem to Babylon and the respective displacements that followed them, it would seem unnatural not to apply this promised return primarily to that of the exiles to Canaan. This was begun with the God-inspired encouragement of Cyrus the Persian in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-3). This return would include not only those of Judah, but those of Israel, who would be once more one people. Jeremiah distinctly promised this very thing relative to the return of the captives (Jer. 3:12-18). Ezekiel once took two sticks and placed them together in one hand to graphically prophesy the reunification of the separate states (Ezek. 37:15-22).² Thus, when Micah declared that all of Jacob would be put back together (v. 12), we see the fulfillment in the return of the captives. It was God Who allowed them to break up, pass through, and go out of the gate of captivity by ordering Cyrus to send the captives home and build Him a house in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-3).

It is quite possible that Micah 2:12-13 has Messianic overtones as well. The reference to assembling all of Jacob and the remnant of Israel could well refer to the preaching of the Gospel by which Christ called (and calls) His people out of the captivity of sin and into His kingdom of spiritual Israel (2 Thess. 2:13-14; Rom. 6:17-18; Eph. 4:8; Rom. 2:28-29). Christ has brought all nations together in one body through the cross (Eph. 2:16-19); thus He would be the “Breaker,” “who breaks down the wall of sin that separated them from the Lord and made them bondsmen.”³

Denunciation Of Evils And Messianic Promises (3:1-5:15)

Chapter 3:1-4: These words of condemnation are addressed to the heads and princes of the people. They are derided for not knowing the meaning of judgment or justice

when they are entrusted with exercising it (v. 1). They had totally reversed their values, hating good and loving evil. They had become so rapacious in robbing and defrauding the people that they are compared to cannibals feasting on the flesh of their fellows (vv. 2-3). In the trials which would come upon these evil rulers, God would turn His face and ears away from plight because of their wickedness (v. 4).

Chapter 3:5-8: This paragraph is an outcry against false prophets. They caused error among the people by their false teaching which wounded its victims, as if bitten, all the while posing as messengers of peace. They would make war against those who did not support them (v. 5). The doom of these bearers of error is described as the night and darkness with no word from God (vv. 6-7). So shall it eventually be with all purveyors of religious error. In contrast, Micah was full of God's spirit, of judgment, of power to faithfully convey God's message of condemnation to Israel (v. 8).

Chapter 3:9-12: In this section prince, judge, priest, and prophet are all denounced (v. 9), and the graphic description of Jerusalem's destruction is set forth. First, the princes were condemned as those who had built Jerusalem upon the blood money of their victims (v. 10). Judges sought bribes, and priests and prophets worked only for money, yet foolishly thought God would forever protect them (v. 11). Not so! The day would come when their evils would be avenged in the leveling of Jerusalem (v. 12). This is the very verse that caused the life of Jeremiah to be spared when he was making similar pronouncements of doom against Jerusalem a century later (Jer. 9:11; 26:18). Nebuchadnezzar would leave it no better than a heap of rubble after his siege and conquest in 586 B.C. (v. 12). While God's judgment against corruption in the government or religion is not always immediate, it is no less certain and severe!

Chapter 4:1-8: This paragraph interrupts the message of judgment upon Jerusalem with one of great hope and promise. As discussed in the introduction (which see for additional comments), verses 1-3 are almost identical with Isaiah 2:2-4. This is the most beautiful, detailed, and incontrovertible description of the establishment of the church of Christ to be found in Holy Writ, and it is found not once, but twice! Little wonder the devil, through unbelieving skeptics, does his best to discredit these sublime and significant verses!

“In the last days,” or, literally, “the end of the days” (v. 1a), marks a time frame. It may mean the last days of the Jewish dispensation, or it may refer to the last dispensation (the present Christian Age) as a whole. In either case, the actual time is the same since the end of the former marked the beginning of the latter. This is an unmistakable reference to the time of the Messiah. “At the end of the days...always denotes the Messianic era when used by the prophets.”⁴ The first Pentecost after the resurrection of the Christ is identified by Peter as the time referred to in this phrase, although he quoted it from Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:16-17).

“The mountain of the house of the Lord” (v. 1b) is a reference to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, on which the temple then stood. It represented the presence, worship, and religion of God. The previous verse (3:12) had told of the utter destruction of the literal “mountain of the house” then standing. It would be replaced with one far better and more exalted, and its place of establishment would be Jerusalem. This can refer to nothing but the kingdom of the Christ, His church, the establishment of which was the outcome of the events on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47).

“People shall flow unto it” (v. 1c). This points to its universal nature and appeal. Isaiah’s wording is a bit plainer: “And all nations shall flow unto it” (Isa. 2:2). The

first phrase of the next verse (Mic. 4:2) proves this to be Micah's meaning. "Nations" is the common Old Testament word for Gentiles. The Gospel and the religion of Christ was to be for all nations, all the world, the whole creation (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47), in contrast with the national restrictions of Judaism. Thus, on Pentecost, Peter declared that the promise included not only those to whom he then spoke (Jews) but also "to all that are afar off" (Gentiles) (Acts 2:39).

In this new age and with this new religion, men of many nations would seek salvation of the God of Jacob and in His house (v. 2a). They would understand that they must go to Him to receive knowledge of His will. The religion of Christ would be (is) one that would (does) require men to learn and understand the Truth of the Gospel (John 6:45; Rom. 10:17). The church is the dispenser of the Gospel to the world (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Law/Word of the Lord would proceed from Zion/Jerusalem (v. 2b). This foretells the sending forth of the Gospel and specifies that it would go forth from Jerusalem when the new order was set up. This is precisely what occurred on Pentecost when the Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, resulting in the establishment of the church of the Lord (Acts 2:14-47). It is worthy of note (for the benefit of those who deny that Christ has any spiritual law which we must obey) that Micah described the Gospel as "the law." In the events recorded in Acts 2, and only in those events, are all of the necessary features found to fulfill this remarkable prophecy, uttered some seven hundred years before its fulfillment. None can read this and properly apply it and still allege that the church is only an afterthought, a substitute, an emergency-inspired institution, not originally planned, but "hatched up" in a moment to operate in the place of the alleged failed kingdom of Christ. It was planned at least seven hundred years in advance!

Christ is depicted as final judge and arbiter of all questions (v. 3a), which authority is exercised through His written Word. His kingdom will not be advanced by fighting armies and carnal weapons (v. 3b; cf. John 18:36). Unlike those in the old kingdom, about to be broken, those in the new kingdom would not need to study or perform military maneuvers any more. The figure of sitting under the vine and fig tree (v. 4a) connotes peace, safety, and security; none would ever prevail against this new kingdom, not even the “gates of hades” (Matt. 16:18). This promise had all of the integrity of God behind it (v. 4b)—it could not and it did not fail.

Micah observed that, while those who are not God’s people would go on trusting in their false, dead, and powerless deities, God’s people would walk in the name of—by the strength and authority of—Jehovah, the true and living God (v. 5a). The empires, institutions, and religions of men come and go, but the church of the Lord would remain and prevail “for ever and ever” (v. 5b). It is the “kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:23, 28) until it is finally delivered by its Savior safely into the Father’s care (1 Cor. 15:24).

In the day when all of these wonderful things would occur, the Lord would gather even those He was going to afflict and cast out so that they would be accepted into His new kingdom (v. 6). They would be once more a “strong nation” with the Lord as their king in Zion (v. 7). This poetic language seems to be saying that even the rebellious and corrupt stock of Israel would not be cut off from the Messianic kingdom, provided, of course, that they choose to be gathered unto God by obeying Him.

Flock towers (v. 8a) were erected by shepherds, from which they could better observe and protect their sheep. Zion/Jerusalem is likened unto such a watchtower as a stronghold, a symbol of safety and strength, from which

the Lord would watch over His people. To it would a kingdom come that would involve the “first (former, DM) dominion,” which refers to the restoration of the throne of David (v. 8b). This foretells the coming of the Messiah, the Son of David, Who was to be given a throne and a kingdom eternal (2 Sam. 7:12-13). These were fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of David (Matt. 1:6-17), Who was raised from the dead, has ascended on high, and has received that throne at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:29-36; cf. Dan. 7:13-14). That everlasting kingdom is His church (Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:2, 13; Heb. 12:23, 28; et al.), which was established in Jerusalem (Acts 2:36-47).

Chapter 4:9-13: In this final part of chapter four, Micah moved from the glorious events of the future (to him) “last days” back to the painful realities of the more immediate present and future circumstances of his people. They would cry aloud as a woman in advanced labor in their pangs of suffering and humiliation, as they would be stripped of their king/counselor (v. 9). The principal source of their pain would be their captivity, during which they would be forced from their homes to live in the fields in the faraway land of Babylon (v. 10a). Here is another absolutely amazing example and proof of Biblical/prophetic inspiration. None but God could know these events of more than a century beyond Micah’s time. This not only involved the fact of Judah’s captivity but also that Babylon, which in the time of Micah was little more than a province of Assyria, would be a world power and the place of exile!

Although the terrible travail was once more announced, it was tempered with the corresponding promise of deliverance (v. 10b). I do not see a Messianic application (except perhaps in a remotely typical sense) in this statement, due to the specific reference to Babylon. I rather take it as simply the promise that they would not evermore remain in their impending captivity. As seen

earlier (cf. comments on 2:12-13), this was fulfilled by Cyrus the Persian, seventy years after the beginning of the exile (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3).

The nations were watching God's people, eager for her to be destroyed (v. 11). However, it was not God's plan to destroy, but merely to punish her for her corruption; it was the bloodthirsty nations that would be destroyed like wheat on the threshing-floor (v. 12). Israel ("daughter of Zion") would be empowered by God to do the threshing of the nations (v. 13a). This is variously understood in reference to the destruction of Sennacherib's army, which would soon surround Jerusalem; to the ultimate demise of Assyria and the return of the remnant from captivity; or to the Maccabean victories over Syria in the second century B.C. The spoils of their conquest would be devoted to the Lord (v. 13b). The judgments and victories described in verses 11-13 would surely typify the spiritual power of spiritual Israel which would be (and now is) exercised through Messiah's Law which issued forth from Zion.

Chapter 5:1-15: The precious gem of this chapter is the promise of the birthplace of the Messiah (v. 2). Many commentators suggest that verse one actually fits better as the conclusion to chapter four. Jerusalem was called upon to gather her forces against her besieger, who would smite their judge upon the cheek (v. 1). This is generally applied to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., which ended with the humiliation of king Zedekiah (their "judge"), which may be correct. It must certainly have its typical force (as does 4:11-13) in reference to the enemies of Christ who would smite and humiliate Him before crucifying Him (Matt. 26:67-68; John 18:22; 19:1-3; et al.). Indeed, one commentator believes that its primary reference is to Christ and suggests that "judge"

should be capitalized to so indicate.⁵ This understanding of verse one would admittedly furnish a perfect preface to verse two.

That verse two is primarily and fundamentally Messianic cannot be rationally disputed. Such was the correct understanding of it by the leaders in Judaism who were contemporary with the Lord (Matt. 2:1-6). None other than the Messiah, the Son of David, Shiloh out of Judah (Gen. 49:10), fits the “ruler in Israel” designation. “Ephratah” is affixed to Bethlehem lest it be confused with any other (e.g., Josh. 19:15). She was little known even in Judah, but she would be propelled to unrivaled fame by being the birthplace of the Messiah. His incarnation is declared in that He had not merely a fleshly, temporal origin, but one everlasting. This prophecy of manifold specifics is another irrefragable evidence of Biblical inspiration!

The next few verses describe some of the works of this “ruler in Israel.” Micah first introduced the figure of a woman in travail to deliver in 4:9-10. There, exiled Judah was compared to a woman in labor, likely the intended application of verse three also. The meaning seems to be that God would give Israel up to trial and subjection, yet preserving a remnant of her, until she brought forth the babe in Bethlehem through Mary. Afterward, they would be allowed to become part of the true Israel, the church.

The Messiah is depicted as a powerful shepherd Who, by the authority of Jehovah, would feed His flock (v. 4; cf. John 10:11). He is described as the provider and protector of the peace against all enemies, which enemies were typified by the Assyrians, their awful tormentors of the moment (vv. 5-6). The “seven shepherds, and eight principal men” are likely intended to convey a more-than-adequate defensive force, symbolizing the power of Christ and His all-conquering power in the final Judgment.

Verses 7 and 8 describe activities of “the remnant of Jacob,” which seems to be a figurative term for Messiah’s kingdom, the church. She would be a blessing among the nations comparable to the dew and showers in a thirsty land (v. 7). Through Christ is the Abrahamic promise fulfilled that God would bless all the nations through his seed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16). She would walk among the nations as a powerful force, treading her spiritual enemies underfoot and defeating sin and Satan, cutting off all enemies (vv. 8-9).

Verses 10-15 compose a unit. “In that day” (v. 10) refers to the day when the Messiah reigns and when the “remnant of Jacob” (the church) prevails. There will be no dependence upon military might and fortresses (vv. 10-11; cf. 4:3) or wizards (v. 12) or false gods (vv. 13-14). Those who refuse to submit to the Christ will suffer His awful vengeance of the Judgment (v. 15). True saints will never use carnal weapons to advance the cause, consult astrologers and fortunetellers, or worship any false god. Woe be unto those Christians who resort to such heathen practices!

The Lord’s Controversy With His People (6:1-7:20)

Chapter 6:1-5: God challenged Israel to give explanation of her rebellion. He called upon the mountains and hills to witness His controversy with His people (vv. 1-2). He severely condemned Israel for her ingratitude, inviting her to produce any excuses she had for it (v. 3), and then reminded them of numerous times He had delivered and spared them, demonstrating His righteousness (vv. 4-5).

Chapter 6:6-8: The response of the people is given in these verses. Could they assuage His wrath by coming before Him with animal sacrifices, offerings of oil, or even

their most prized possession, a firstborn child (vv. 6-7)? No! Such outward manifestations of devotion by themselves were quite insufficient. God also demanded wholeness of character, demonstrated in just, merciful, and humble behavior (v. 8). As the following section will show, these were the very things of which they were bereft, leaving them a people whose corruptions could not be cleansed by merely empty, outward ritual.

This passage must not be twisted to imply that God did (does) not desire, command, or accept outward manifestations of devotion to Him. Indeed, he has required these in every age. First, let us understand that this proposal was not made by a people intent on pleasing God. Rather, they were trying to “buy off” God through their sacrifices, so as to continue in their iniquities. Second, just as sacrifice can never be a substitute for obedience (1 Sam. 15:22), neither can man save himself by his own moral goodness apart from appropriating the blood of Christ, God’s perfect sacrifice for sin (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-21; et al.). The main point of this passage is that outward acts of worship are vain and hypocritical if not invested with the power of a virtuous life. It is tragic to see some of God’s people even now, who have been deceived into believing they can live in worldliness through the week as long as they “go through the motions” of worship on the Lord’s day.

Chapter 6:9-16: This paragraph consists of a statement, God’s charges against His people, and the reward they will receive for their behavior. Micah depicted his message as the voice of Jehovah, the rod of judgment, crying unto the city (Jerusalem), to which wise men would give heed (v. 9). Through both questions and declarations, God set out His charges against the people. They gained and held their treasures by giving God-despised scant measures, wicked balances, and deceitful weights (vv.

10-11). They had enriched themselves by violence and fraud (v. 12). Their punishments would sicken them (v. 13). These would involve want, disaster, deprivation, and utter humiliation (vv. 14-15). These very curses were foretold by Moses some eight hundred years before the time of Micah as the rewards of rebellion against God's Law, including the fact that they would be led captive into a foreign land (Deut. 28:29-45).

"The statutes of Omri" and the "works of the house of Ahab" (v. 16) refer to the behavior of the people following the wicked influence of those men of 150 years before. Omri, king of Israel (ca. 894-876 B.C.), was a man of consummate iniquity (1 Kings 16:25). He produced not only a wicked son, Ahab, who corrupted Israel with the worship of Baal (16:30-33), but the equally evil Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who hastened the corruption of Judah (2 Chron. 21:5-6; 22:1-4). Thus, the solemn charge and judgment of verse sixteen is seen to apply to all of Jacob (both Israel and Judah). (Influence is a powerful thing, spanning generations, yea centuries!) The point of Micah 6:16 is that the people had rejected God by rejecting His Law (John 12:48), and now they must pay the inevitable, awful price. This is typical of the even more severe, eternal penalty that must be paid for rebellion against God and His Son (John 5:28-29; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Chapter 7:1-20: Micah closed his prophetic message with a final description of the sins of his people, a statement of hope, and an outpouring of praise. Verses 1-6 summarize the widespread iniquity among God's people. Micah was utterly depressed and disappointed at what he saw all about him (v. 1). No righteous man could be found (Psm. 14:1-3; Rom. 3:10), but all sought how to victimize each other (v. 2). They so lusted for evil that they wrought it with both hands; even their leaders openly sought bribes (v. 3). Their finest man was no better than a hurtful brier

or thorn hedge; the word of the prophets (watchmen), promising their doom, would come to pass (v. 4). Dishonesty and greed so reigned that none could trust friend, wife, parent, or child (vv. 5-6). Jesus quoted verse six (Matt. 10:35-36; Luke 12:52-53) to describe the results of the persecution that would be caused by following Him. The picture painted by Micah is one in which all civil and social institutions have collapsed and anarchy reigned. Such is the sordid picture of man, wherever and whenever there is general renunciation of God!

Verses 7-15 constitute a message of hope, against the backdrop of terrible trial and suffering they must experience. Micah would not reject God but would look unto Him in faith for deliverance (v. 7). The rejoicing of God's enemies would be brief because God would raise His fallen people after they suffered the fruit of their sin (vv. 8-10). He would restore them, Zion's walls would be rebuilt, and the nations would come to her for blessing (vv. 11-12). Those in the world who would reject God and His people would remain bereft of blessing as the fruit of their works (v. 13). God would give His remnant of faithful people the choice blessings of peace and security such as would cause the nations to be awe-struck (vv. 14-17).

There is seen in this highly figurative language a reference to the literal return of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile. However, we dare not ignore the Messianic implications of the passage. These include the building of the church in Jerusalem (v. 11; cf. 4:1), her universal appeal (v. 12; cf. 4:1-2), that peace and security would reside in her (v. 14; cf. Eph. 2:15; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 13:5-6), and the marvelous signs and wonders of the Lord and His apostles that would accompany it (v. 15; cf. John 20:30-31; Acts 2:12; 5:12; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; et al.).

In verses 16 and 17, there may be a reference to the demonstration of God's power in the resurrection of His

Son and how it caused all of the power that men could bring against Him (i.e., the crucifixion) to pale in comparison. Others see in it the power of the Gospel to humble men⁶ or the abject submission of all men to God and His Son at the Judgment.⁷ Those who see in this section promises of a literal millennial kingdom on earth during which the nations shall submit to Israel with Christ on a throne in Jerusalem are guilty of grievous and fatal error.

Verses 18-20 contain a beautiful doxology, a natural progression from the preceding recital of God's blessings upon His restored Israel. He is an incomparable God, able to forgive even the atrocious inequities of which His people were guilty (vv. 18-19). Micah concluded by stating that God would fulfill the promises He had foresworn to Abraham and Jacob (Gen. 12:3; 28:14). These promises required the preservation of Israel until their fulfillment. Since Micah knew that they had not yet been fulfilled, he knew beyond doubt that Israel would be preserved and returned from captivity. We have the light of the New Testament to show us that our Christ was the aim of those promises (Gal. 3:16), through Whom all men who will may be blessed by His saving Gospel!

Conclusion

The prophecy of Micah is a marvelous piece of inspired literature. It demonstrates the inspiration of its author by its otherwise totally inexplicable, detailed prophecies of the literal destruction and captivity of both Israel and Judah, of the exile to Babylon, and of the return. It is even more remarkable in its detailed prophecies of the establishment of the church and of the birthplace of the only begotten Son of God. One must be an infidel of the rankest sort to deny the inspiration of this book!

Endnotes

1 James Moffatt, **Holy Bible, A Translation** (New York, NY: Harper, 1930).

2 For a fuller discussion of this reunification see the author's material in **Living Lessons from the Prophets** (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1985), pp. 202-203.

3 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 200.

4 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsh, **Commentary on the Old Testament**, Volume 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982 reprint), p. 456.

5 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, Volume 2 (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. Co., 1981), pp. 339-341.

6 Hailey, p. 220.

7 Coffman, pp. 375-376.

CHAPTER 19

Great Lessons From The Book Of Micah

Gary Colley

Introduction

THE WISE MAN WHO, before he read any book, insisted on knowing about its author was a right thinker. This is especially true when studying one of the inspired records in the Bible. Since God did not change the style and manner of the man who wrote when He spoke inspiration through him, great insights are here to be found. We may know more about some writers than others, but what can be gleaned is helpful.

Who Is Micah?

We are not afforded very much background on the life of Micah. Some suggestion has been made that he was a farmer in his early life or at least that he was raised in that environment, since many of his illustrations are from farming rather than from the references that would be made by a shepherd. His name has the interesting meaning “who is like Jehovah,” which points to parents who believed in God. He lived in Moresheth-gath, a village in the southwest part of Judah, and therefore he is referred to as “the Morasthite.” This area was previously under the rule of Gath, one of the five great Philistine cities. It was about fifty years previous to Micah’s time that the land was taken

by Judah. Micah is not to be confused with Micaiah, son of Imlah, a former prophet of Ahab's day, who foretold Ahab's defeat and impending death (1 Kings 22:8-28). Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos, who were also great men of God. He taught and admonished the people during the sinful and degenerate reign of Ahaz, one of the very wicked kings of Judah. The New Testament declares these men to have been inspired (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The length of time of Micah's prophesying amounted to about fifty years from 738 to 690 B.C.

Idolatry In Full Bloom

During the reign of Ahaz, who was completely indifferent toward Divine matters, idolatry was practiced openly in Judah. Micah was bold in his love of God and willing and ready to be used in His service. He saw the work that needed to be done and went forth to the task. His fidelity has always been unquestioned. Though recognized as the sixth of the "minor" prophets, because of less writing than the "major" prophets, his work is not lacking in content, power, and application. His work was to cry out against the sins of Samaria and Jerusalem (Mic. 1:1). Just as Amos had condemned the rich for oppressing the poor, acting with cruel treatment to accomplish the task, so Micah also cried out against these injustices! Hosea expressed clearly the disloyalty of Israel against Jehovah, Who had acted to bless and protect them as a husband, and thus also did Micah! Likewise, Malachi sternly condemned the cold formalities of the priest and the people in their ceremonial acts of worship, and so did Micah. He denounced the sins and pronounced great judgments against Israel and Judah, their rulers, and false prophets. He effectively foretold of the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, the return of the Jews from captivity, as well

as the punishment in time of their enemies. Micah's work helped in the revival of the partial reformation under Hezekiah after the evil rule of Ahaz (Jer. 26:18-19).

A Look At The Book

The general theme of the seven chapters, consisting of one hundred five verses, of this great book is to call back God's people to their God. Remember that Israel was subdued by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Judah existed as a kingdom until 586 B.C., at which time Babylon took them completely into captivity. Micah's style of writing has been referred to as "elevated and vehement, with frequent transitions," and without doubt he wrote with great force, intense feeling, and with strong expression as a man of God! His farming illustrations clearly express God's controversy with His people. Hence his book joins with the other minor prophets in dealing with the needs of this sinful people in no uncertain terms.

Rich In Sermon Material

A long list of sermon topics which were needful in the days of Micah is also needful today. Since the Old Testament was recorded "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4) and for our "example" and "our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11), a profitable study of this book should be made. Subjects such as apostasy, influence, God's judgment, doom, restoration, promise, and hope are specifically dealt with here. Enlarge these subjects as Micah did with subjects like "The Mercy of God and His Justice," "The Horrible Result of Sin," "The Need for Plain Preaching," "The Necessity of a Penitent Heart," "The Danger of Hardening our Hearts Toward God," "The Wonders of God's Providence," and "The Importance

of Seeing That the Harvest Depends on the Sowing.” These and other topics for needed lessons today are endless throughout the writings of Micah and the other minor prophets.

The Predictive Elements

Though great condemnation is pronounced by Micah, he does not fail to convey a bright promise of hope as he directs their minds toward the coming of the Messiah. He majestically draws the picture of the foundation of all hope in the glorious future in speaking of the Messiah’s coming, “whose goings forth have been from the old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). He predicts Bethlehem in Judea as the birthplace where Christ, the “Lion of Judah,” would bring peace, joy, and love to those pressed down by sin. The Jews accepted this prediction as correct (Matt. 2:5-6; John 7:41-42). In addition to these prophecies, which were precisely fulfilled in Christ’s coming, Micah’s book is proved authentic by the quotations of Christ and the apostles. Take your Bible and compare Micah 4:5 and 5:5 with John 10:35-36 and Ephesians 2:14. Second, compare Micah 7:6 with Matthew 10:35-36; Mark 13:12; and Luke 12:53. Third, notice Micah 5:2 and its connection with John 7:42. All of these prophecies and their “mates,” or fulfillments, should prove to all alike that the Messiah and Jesus Christ the Lord, the Son of the living God, are identical. Let us who know these things accept Him with all our hearts as the redeeming Saviour of the world!

Micah’s Prophecy: Three Sections

Each of the three divisions of the book of Micah begins with the same words, “Hear ye” (Mic. 1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

The Beginning Section

The first section begins with a threatening description of the coming of Jehovah to judge the sins, and

especially idolatry, found in Israel and Judah (Mic. 1:2-4). Included also is the sentence pronounced upon the evil in Samaria, capital of Israel, by the Judge (1:5-7). Micah sees the dangers pending for God's people. He even traces in prophetic language the devastating march of the Assyrian conquerors (1:8-16). He pronounces God's misery in punishment upon the people generally for their corruption, violence, idolatry, and immorality. In their haughtiness, pride, and arrogance, they continued to be plotters of wickedness (2:1-3). Of the seven items mentioned in Proverbs, six which God hates, their words and actions matched with most (Prov. 6:16-19). In addition to these heinous sins, they acted with unconcern for Jehovah's worship! Their depravity had become so great that even mourning, depicted by "baldness" here and in Isaiah 22:12, would not save them from captivity. They had turned away from Jehovah in sin too long. They have sown, and now they must reap for their sowing the wrath of God. Micah says their strong cities would become a heap of ruin, just as would be the effects of their corrupted lives. God had warned, entreated, and pleaded with them, but, in their rebellion and riotous living which brought them to judgment, God's warnings were unheeded (Josh. 23:14-16; 25:13-16). In vivid terms of certainty, Micah shows that with them in punishment were the false prophets who led them astray. How tragic to see what men will do for gain, popularity, and power, in encouraging others in their appetites, greed, and luxury (Mic. 2:1-11). Their sentence of captivity is passed upon them (2:10) but is followed instantly by a promise of restoration and triumphant return for some (2:12-13).

The Second Section

This division is devoted especially to the princes, false prophets, and head of the people. Their cruel and shameful

actions due to their hunger for riches and greedy plundering are rebuked in the strongest terms. Instead of leading the people correctly in harmony with high principles, they had caused God's people to stray from good and right! The steady decline continued to manifest itself from the point in time three hundred and fifty years previous, when the people cried "Give us a king" besides Jehovah. But again the deserved threatening of the fury of God's wrath against these hypocritical deceivers (Mic. 3:8-12) is succeeded by a promise of restoration (4:1-3; Isa. 2:2). As Micah's mind sees the glories of the Messianic kingdom, he seems to lose sight of the desolation which should befall God's people. How important for every man to see the glorious kingdom which we now enjoy in the Christian dispensation! Paul exclaims, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). We enjoy today what they looked forward to!

The Third Section

In the last section, consisting of chapters six and seven, Jehovah is represented as holding, in justice and mercy, a controversy with His people. It begins with "Hear ye," as the other sections, but here He summons His people to contend before the mountains as their witnesses. Jehovah shames them as He reminds them of how many things He had done for them in blessing them many times when they deserved cursing. God pleads with them in justification of His own conduct and the wisdom of His requirements. He did not want, nor would He accept, their empty, cold, formal worship. Micah acknowledges the justice of God's sentence, and, in the likeness of Moses and Jeremiah, he weeps over their condition. As ingrates,

they had brought punishment upon themselves by exchanging the wise counsels of heaven for their own thinking (Mic. 7:1-6). With Micah's rebukes from Jehovah, and the acknowledging of sin by the people who had refused God, we can now observe how patiently the people look to God as they repent and are by God promised deliverance after suffering. As they behold the blessings of the future, singing returns in a concluding song of triumphant joy (7:7, 18-20).

Conclusion

How many and varied are the sermon ideas that come to mind from this outstanding book of Micah! Lessons are needed now as they were then on "The Need of Humility," "The Wages of Sin," "The Overruling Providence of God," "The Power of Repentance," "The Purpose of Powerful Preaching," and "The Ultimate Victory of Truth and Right." All of these important lessons are clearly proclaimed by God's faithful prophet Micah in his book!

The close of Micah's life, according to tradition, came because of his rebuke to Jehoram for his wickedness. It is said that he was thrown from a steep rock cliff to his death. Tradition also says he was buried at Morathi, in his own country, near the cemetery of Enakim. However, whatever may be true about his last day on earth, we rejoice in the powerful efforts he made in his expression of love for God and His people. He grew not weary in his long period of service, as he looked toward God for the needed help and knowing that in due season he would reap for his labors, if he fainted not (Gal. 6:7-9). We stand in awe of this man Micah, a preacher of righteousness!

CHAPTER 20

Introduction To The Book Of Nahum

Mac Deaver

Introduction

THE BOOK BEGINS WITH a reference to the “burden of Nineveh” or the “oracle concerning Nineveh.” Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the city is referred to by name three times in this book (Nah. 1:1; 2:8; 3:7). And the “king of Assyria” is mentioned in 3:18.

Through Nahum, God is predicting the destruction of the Assyrian capital. Over a hundred years had gone by since the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken into Assyrian captivity, and the southern kingdom of Judah, though not having been deported to a foreign land, has been suffering at the hands of Assyrian power. And God wants Judah to know that the domination of Nineveh is about to end (1:15).

God had earlier sent Jonah to Nineveh, and he declared to the inhabitants that God was about to overthrow the city (Jonah 3:1-4). The people of Nineveh at that time had turned away from their evil, and God had spared the city (3:5-10). But now through Nahum we learn that God is ready to bring Nineveh to destruction. The city is again vile (Nah. 1:14). She is a bloody city full of lies and rapine or robbery (3:1). She is characterized by a multitude of whoredoms and is the mistress of witchcrafts

(3:4). She has continually afflicted others with her wickedness (3:19). She will now be punished by a jealous God Who takes vengeance on His enemies (1:2).

Nahum predicts that “The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved” (2:6). This may not be simply figurative language, for a river was involved in the actual overthrow of the city, at least according to one account:

The best account, however, (of the overthrow, MD) is that of Diodorus Siculus, who refers to a legend that the city could not be taken until the river became its enemy. Arbaces, the Sythian, besieged it, but could not make any impression on it for 2 years. In the 3rd year, however, the river (according to Commander Jones, not the Tigris, but the Khosr), being swollen by rains, and very rapid in its current, carried away a portion of the wall, and by this opening the besiegers gained an entrance. The king, recognizing in this the fulfilment of the oracle, gathered together his concubines and eunuchs, and, mounting a funeral pyre which he had caused to be constructed, perished in the flames.¹

When Jonah cried against the city of Nineveh, it was a large city (Jonah 3:4), consisting of more than one hundred and twenty thousand people (4:11). It was a walled city, but her walls would not be able to protect her from the wrath of Jehovah. She is warned to protect herself but is by Nahum informed that such an effort will be in vain (Nah. 2:2, 6, 10, 13; 3:5-7, 11-15, 18-19).

Date Of Writing

At the time of Nahum’s prophetic work, Nineveh is still wielding her power, and God is about to restore “the excellency of Israel,” for Israel or Jacob had suffered a destruction (2:2). A second time indicator is found in 3:8-10, where we are informed that Noamon (ASV) or No (KJV) had already suffered a defeat and had gone into captivity:

No is Thebes, in Upper Egypt, called by the Greeks Diospolis, the capitol of that part of the kingdom; and we now learn from the cuneiform records that Assurbanipal, the son and successor of Esarhaddon, took that city in his second expedition against Urdamani, or Rud-Amon, the successor of Tirhakah, and carried the inhabitants away. This invasion took place soon after the death of Tirhakah which occurred B.C. 664.²

Nahum wants Nineveh to be assured that what has already happened to Noamon is about to happen to her:

The time of Nahum is placed by some as early as 735 B.C. and by some in the latter part of the reign of Hezekiah. No other nation claims the prophet's attention, and the fall of Assyria is regarded as at hand. This would bring the date of Nahum to about 610 B.C. The prophet refers to the fall to Thebes in Egypt by Assyria, which occurred about 668 B.C., and declares the same thing is about to happen to Assyria. The time of the prophecy therefore is later than that date.³

The overthrow of Noamon (Thebes) took place around 663 B.C. And the destruction of Nineveh was about 606 B.C.⁴ According to one writer, "most scholars place the date about 620 B.C."⁵

The Writer

Not much is known about the writer of this book. His name evidently means "consolation" or "consoler,"⁶ and the name would seem to suggest the comforting message that Nahum was bringing to Judah regarding the termination of Assyrian domination (1:15). Though Judah would face another problem (and power) for her refusal to straighten up her own affairs, the message of Nahum in regard to Assyria should offer some momentary relief.

The writer is identified as "the Elkoshite." Several suggestions have been made as to the location of the town

Elkosh, but the information thus far available seems to be less than conclusive. Nahum remains very obscure.

Outline

Chapter One—Jehovah Will Avenge His People

- I. Introduction (v. 1).
- II. Jehovah is in control and will punish his enemies (vv. 2-8).
- III. Assyria is helpless before Jehovah (vv. 9-12a).
- IV. Judah is given relief (vv. 12b-13).
- V. Idolatrous Assyria is about to be overthrown (v. 14).
- VI. Judah is called on to be faithful and is assured that Assyria will cease to be a burden (v. 15).

Chapter Two—Jehovah Will Destroy Nineveh

- I. Nineveh is warned to protect herself but is informed that such effort will be futile (vv. 1-7).
- II. Nineveh's power will fail her, and her wealth will be taken from her (vv. 8-13).

Chapter Three—Nineveh's Wickedness

- I. Nineveh will suffer for her wickedness (vv. 1-7).
- II. Nineveh's fate will be like that of Noamon (vv. 8-10).
- III. Neither fortresses nor a multitude of people can prevent her desolation (vv. 11-17).
- IV. Assyria is unaware of the approaching danger (v. 18).
- V. All who have been victimized by Assyria's wickedness will rejoice to learn of her destruction (v. 19).

Endnotes

1 T. G. Pinches, "Nineveh," **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Volume 4, 2nd edition, p. 2151.

2 “The Book of Nahum,” **The Pulpit Commentary**, 1950, MV, P. V.

3 **The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible**, 1966, p. 1049.

4 F. C. Eiselen, “Nahum, The Book Of,” **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Volume 4, 2nd edition, p. 2110.

5 **The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible**, 1985, p. 1104.

6 Eiselen, p. 2109.

CHAPTER 21

Commentary On The Book Of Nahum

H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

Introduction

WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT the prophet Nahum. We do not know his place of birth, his family history, or the manner, time, and location of his death. It is enough for us to know that he was a man of God who foretold the destruction of Nineveh.

God sent Jonah to announce the overthrow of Nineveh, but the king and the people of Nineveh repented at his preaching. They dressed themselves and their domestic animals in sackcloth. The king and the people sat in ashes, and cried aloud to the God of heaven to forgive and spare them. God is merciful and eager to forgive. He allowed the Ninevites to continue for a short time.

The Ninevites were so evil and so accustomed to seizing and carrying off, by force, the property of others that they soon reverted to their engrafted ways. They violated the border of mercy and brought swift and sure destruction upon themselves. It was the work of Nahum to announce that Nineveh was to be destroyed without remedy. The announcement was apparently made in Jerusalem and to Judah.

The city of Nineveh was among the oldest cities in the world at the time of Jonah and Nahum. Asshur went

forth out of Shinar and built Nineveh (Gen. 10:11). This was sometime after the flood and before the call of Abram. The name of Asshur lived in the memory of the people of Nineveh, and they promoted the dead Asshur to the status of god. The word Assyria is from the name Asshur. The Ninevites called themselves Assyrians. Asshur built other cities in the same region and founded a nation.

The Assyrians grew strong. Power corrupts people and nations. The Assyrians became so mighty that they were corrupt absolutely. They ran roughshod over other people. Isaiah calls them a “fierce people” (Isa. 33:19). The Assyrian rulers were vicious, and their army irresistible. The later rulers became worse and worse. After winning one battle, the Assyrians cut off the legs of the officers of the opposing army and flayed the nobles and stretched their skins over a pole. A defeated enemy could expect plundering, devastation, and slaughter. The Assyrian name became a synonym for rabid and unbridled cruelty. One Assyrian ruler described himself as “trampling down the country like a wild bull.”

God used Assyria to punish Israel. Assyrian troops scourged and killed many of the people of the northern kingdom. The victor deported the survivors, and ruined Israel.

The three chapters of the book of the prophet Nahum are the three divisions of his writing. Chapter one tells of the sovereignty of God and His angry punishment of all who make themselves His enemies by rebellion to His will. Chapter two foretells the sacking of Nineveh. Chapter three describes the sins of the Assyrians and the necessity of punishing them.

The book of Nahum is a poem. We understand the message of the prophet in the same way we understand any other writing. The words being in meter and rhythm does not change the method of understanding those words.

Whether poetry, prose, parable, prophetic imagery, or history, we understand the meaning by asking, “Who said what to whom, when was it said, and for what reason?” Answering this question involves a careful study of the text, the context, and the larger context. No matter what the literary style, we still learn from positive statements, implication that must be inferred, and approved example. We do not have a different method of interpretation for each writing mode.

W. J. Deane says of the book of Nahum:

His prophecy is a poem, stately, orderly, and impressive, all the parts of which are well arranged and mutually conducive to the unity of the whole. It is eminently tuneful and rhythmical, the words “re-echoing to the sense,” and hurrying the hearer away with the speaker in complete sympathy. The style is full of force, the coloring brilliant, the picturing lifelike.

Chapter One

Verse 1: “The burden of Nineveh.” It should never be pleasant to pronounce doom. When death and destruction are the thesis, the heart of the prophet should be heavy. It is wrong to delight in the misery of another; it is always right to sorrow at calamity. God commissioned Nahum to prophesy a time of accounting for the Assyrians. He obeyed, but with the attitude of “looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

“Nahum the Elkoshite.” The word “Nahum” means “consoler.” It was consolation to all who had suffered at the hands of the Assyrians that the hateful Ninevites were about to receive their comeuppance. A day of reckoning always comes. One day there will be final judgment, when all wrongs will be put right, and truth and righteousness will win out. The faithful will be more than conquerors in Christ. Nahum was from Elkosh, which some say may have

been a hamlet in Galilee. If so, he must have moved from Israel to Judah, where he gave his famous prophecy. Some say Elkosh was beyond the Jordan or in the south of Judah. "Unknown" is the safest conclusion. Assyria had threatened Jerusalem. Assyria was soon to fall, and great would be the fall of it. This would console the Jews who lived in fear of the brutal Assyrians.

Verse 2: "Jehovah is a jealous God." God impressed upon the liberated tribes of Israel the fact of His jealousy (Exod. 20:5). Therefore Jehovah is also a God of "vengeance" and "wrath." An angry God redresses every violation of His moral code: "The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small." It is a very great delusion to suppose that God, because of His inimitable love, will not punish the guilty. God's Word is steadfast and "every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward." The very nature of God makes it necessary that He be intolerant of unfaithfulness and rivalry. In the character of Jehovah is both goodness and severity (Rom. 11:22): "Our God is a consuming fire."

Verse 3: "Jehovah is slow to anger..."and will by no means clear the guilty." God is longsuffering, and not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. If the wicked do not get a new mind, the time will surely come, though the hour be long delayed, when the flaming fire of the Almighty will consume the stubble of earth.

"Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind." The tornado is a concentrated storm and therefore very powerful, but God is stronger. The lashing sea is awesome in its strength, but God controls the winds and the waves. His mastery of the forces of nature teaches eloquently that His authority is infinite. We rejoice in the warmth of His eternal love but must never forget the intenseness of His terrible wrath. One day we will see the fullness of His anger unleashed.

Verse 4: “He rebuketh the sea.” The parting of the waters of the Red Sea was a vivid demonstration of Divine might. Bashan, Carmel, “and the flower of Lebanon languisheth.” The fertile fields of earth and the towering cedars of Lebanon wither at His glance. The irresistible strength of an Almighty God is past description. When God brings the wicked to justice, there is no relief. By the power of His Word, God caused the ancient world to perish by water: “the heavens that now are, and the earth, by that same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7).

Verse 5: “The mountains quake at him.” The “everlasting hills” tremble and melt at His presence. Earthquakes break the rocks in pieces, but the anger of the Lord is more terrible. “The world and all that dwell therein” are upheaved at the thought of godly justice.

Verse 6: “Who can stand before his indignation?” Nothing human can endure the fire of His anger:

The kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:15-17).

Verse 7: “Jehovah is good.” The Creator takes no pleasure in judgment and punishment. The “strange work” and “strange act” of God are His coming to destroy, pluck up, and cast down. It is “strange” to Him because it is foreign to His nature. He prefers to bless, but He will punish, and can “kill both body and soul in hell.” He is “a stronghold in the day of trouble.” The righteous of earth

can flee like a bird to the safety of His sheltering and protecting arms. The same power that melts mountains will defend the pure of heart and assuage every sorrow.

Verse 8: “But with an over-flowing flood he will make a full end of her place.” God is gracious, loving, and kind; therefore, He will crush and trample upon those who are crude and contemptible. In the book of Revelation, Jesus has feet “like burnished brass” that He may walk upon with indifference those who have treated His cross with indifference. God will “pursue his enemies into darkness,” leaving no trace.

Verse 9: “What do you devise against Jehovah?” What plan of man can avoid His righteous indignation? What defense is there against the naked might of a sovereign God? It is folly to fight against the Lord. It is madness to suppose earthly powers can defeat the armies of heaven. Build your walls, throw up your bulwarks, make your defense, and you will soon find that there is no armor to protect from the wrath of the living God: “He will make a full end; affliction shall not rise up a second time.” The final judgment of God and punishment of evildoers is once for all. His winnowing fan separates the chaff, and He burns it like “stubble fully dry.” It will not rise a second time. It cannot! Its destruction is total. Nahum announces that Nineveh would fall to rise no more.

Verse 10: “For entangled like thorns, and drunken as with their drink.” The Assyrians considered themselves to be invincible. Briars and thorns tangled together in great mass are most difficult to pass through. The Ninevites felt their defenses were impassable, and it may have been true, until you consider that they were fighting against God. God was on the side of the Medes and Chaldeans in the war with Assyria. Therefore, the ramparts of Nineveh gave no protection. There are no bastions that can stand before the scorn of the Lord. It is

altogether a mistake to depend upon arms of flesh and refuse to lean upon everlasting arms. The Assyrians had the false pride of a drunk and the unfounded sense of safety of a sot. The drunkard has very poor judgment.

Verse 11: “There is one gone forth out of thee, that deviseth evil against Jehovah, that counselleth wickedness.” The counselor of Belial had come out of Nineveh. His advice was worthless. His plot against the Lord was worse than foolish. It is incredible that mere mortals would ever undertake to contradict and defy the only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is tragic that men walking around in bodies of clay would boast themselves as wiser than God: “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” The arrogant counselor of the shameless Assyrians made sure their defeat by his vain talk, and empty schemes: “The Lord is God, and needeth not the poor devices of men.” Those who say God is too good to punish the wicked and visit every transgression with its just recompense of reward encourage rebellion and counsel wickedness: “Man is not wiser than God.”

Verse 12: “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.” The prophet of God addresses the people of God and, pointing to Assyria, says, though they may appear to be ever so strong and secure, they will be annihilated. God will mow them down like hay before the sharp sickle. The worthless counselor will pass away. Jerusalem therefore can be assured that Assyria will afflict her no more. Jehovah used Assyria to punish His people in the past, but never again.

Verse 13: “And now I will break his yoke from off thee.” Judah would witness the destruction of Nineveh.

The yoke and bonds of the Assyrian would be broken in pieces and put asunder. The Jews would never more fear the cohorts of Assyria.

Verse 14: “No more of thy name be sown.” Nahum now tells Nineveh that her proud name will come to nothing and be trampled in the mire. The gods of Assyria (Asshur, Nisroch, Nabu, Anu, Adad, and the goddess Ishtar) would be cut in pieces, and the severed parts carried from the temple: “The idols are broke in the temple of Baal.” Sennacherib IV had besieged Jerusalem, but the first day of the siege was also the last and saw both the encampment and flight of the Assyrian army. A violent plague killed 185,000 soldiers of Assyria: “Their hearts but once heaved and forever grew still.” The might of the Gentile: “unsmote by the sword, hath melted like snow, in the glance of the Lord!” Sennacherib IV took his skeleton army back to Nineveh, where his own sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, assassinated him while he was at worship in the house of Nisroch his god (Isa. 37:38). Assyria was vile, and therefore God made her grave. The capital, Nineveh, and the nation, Assyria, were consigned by Divine fiat to oblivion. The children of Asshur were weighed and found wanting.

Verse 15: “Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.” The people of Judah receive the welcome message that Assyria was brought to rack and ruin. The Jews, now free from fear of Assyrian invasion, joyfully keep their feasts, and worship Jehovah.

Chapter Two

Verse 1: “He that dasheth in pieces is come up against thee.” God’s man turns his attention to the battle in which Assyria fell, never to rise again. The dasher in pieces is by some called the “maul” or “the hammer.” History gives the information that Babylon and Media joined forces and wiped out Nineveh. The old enemies of

Assyria had gathered their strength and came against their enemy with hatred born of many years of abuse, humiliation, and frustration.

“Keep the fortress, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.” Nahum, in imitation of Elijah, who had mocked and rebuked the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, urges the Assyrians to mount the battle stations, summon up their strength, and get ready for a contest they were sure to lose. It was unequal. God was using the king of Babylon, and the prince of Persia as a scourge to punish the wayward Asshurites. It was neither Babylon nor Media that made the outcome certain, but God was in the fray, and that was insurmountable.

Verse 2: “Jehovah restoreth the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel.” The Assyrians had for long years been a bane to the Jews and had “emptied them out, and destroyed their vinebranches.” The northern kingdom of Israel was barbarously trampled by the indifferent feet of Assyrian soldiers. This was the appointment of an outraged God. Assyria must not make the mistake of supposing she had overrun Israel by her strength. As Habakkuk observed, Jehovah will use evil people to punish His wayward children. Those who breach a covenant with God may be chastised by people more evil than they. Still, God watches from within the shadows, and ultimately He will restore the excellency of His chosen people. The excellency of Jacob and Israel does not mean the northern and southern kingdoms, but the whole nation. He who was at first Jacob became Israel.

Verse 3: “The shield of his mighty men is made red.” One wonders if the shield is red by bloodstains. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar carried shields painted red, and wore scarlet: “The chariots flash with steel, and the cypress spears are brandished.”

Verse 4: “The chariots rage in the streets.” The war horses and chariots of the victorious army flashed about in the defeated city like lightning in a terrible storm.

Verse 5: “He remembereth his nobles.” The king of Assyria calls to mind the mighty men who had served him so well in other days and other battles. He calls for them, and they come “stumbling.” When they reach the walls and look at the enemy, they see the mantelets prepared. The battering rams are in place. The towers are ready to be moved against the walls of the city. The breach is certain to occur. The city cannot be defended. The nobles stagger and reel at the sight.

Verse 6: “The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved.” The overwhelming flood of zealous and determined warriors, coupled with the approval and support of the unseen hand of the Almighty, caused the royal city to dissolve. The capital fell, and with it the nation.

Verse 7: “She is uncovered, she is carried away.” Nineveh’s shame was exposed. The people became slaves. The low, sad wail of the mourning dove was heard in the land. The young ladies of Nineveh wept and beat upon their hearts.

Verse 8: “But Nineveh hath been from of old like a pool of water.” For a long time, Assyria had been like an oasis in the desert. She had attracted many people who came for refreshing water, but now she is forsaken. The people who sought her out for the pleasure she could give do not tarry but quickly leave. The city was a place of misery to be forsaken swiftly. The leaders cry, “Stand, stand, but none looketh back.”

Verse 9: “Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold.” The invader was to carry away the booty of war. There were many priceless treasures in Nineveh: “There was no end of the store, the glory of all goodly

furniture.” For more than a thousand years, Asshur had plundered and pillaged all nations of earth. Her overflowing treasures, amassed over ages, were carried away by marauders and looters. Gold and silver take wings and fly away; moth and rust consume, and thieves break through and steal. Therefore, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20).

Verse 10: “She is empty, and void, and waste.”

The fabulous city that for so long had been a jewel is now as nothing. Empty, void, and waste describe her wretched condition. The people of Assyria, once so proud and boastful, are crushed: “The heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and anguish is in all loins, and the faces of them all are waxed pale.” Faltering and failing hearts, trembling with abject fear, and faces drained of blood picture the defeated citizens of Nineveh.

Verse 11: “Where is the den of the lions?” The lion is the king of the jungle. The Assyrians were like lions. The question is, where are they now? The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that for centuries no one knew where the city once existed. It was not until the nineteenth century that the ruins of Nineveh were discovered on the banks of the Tigris River. Those who had once walked the earth with such ferocious pride left hardly a trace of their existence.

Verse 12: “The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lioness, and filled his caves with prey.” The king of Assyria tore the fruit of the labor of others from their hands and gave it to his harem and his children. Those who love gold are not satisfied with gold, and those who love increase are not satisfied with silver. The appetite of the Assyrian for wealth was insatiable.

Verse 13: “Behold I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts.” It is terrible to have Jehovah as an

enemy. Assyria had earned the opposition of God. Her chariots were to be burned with fire. Her young men were to be devoured. Her messengers would be mute.

Chapter Three

Verse 1: “Woe to the bloody city!” Nahum describes the unrelieved butchery of the people of Nineveh. They were vicious beyond description. They tied up prisoners and ran them through with swords. They put rings through the lips of defeated nobles, ropes through the rings, and dragged them to death behind chariots. One Assyrian mural depicts a prisoner with a ring through his lips and a rope tied to the ring, on his knees, hands lifted in entreaty as if pleading for mercy, and the king punching out both eyes with a spear.

“It is full of lies and rapine.” The great men of Nineveh lied to both allies and enemies. They made agreements for their advantage and broke their solemn word for their convenience. It gave them no pause, knowingly, to swear falsely: “The prey departeth not.” Its evil continued. Like the sin-sodden antediluvians, “every imagination of the thought of their heart was only evil continually.” Bloodshed and deceit identified Assyria.

Verse 2: “The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels, and prancing horses, and bounding chariots.” The inspired writer describes the invading army of Assyria in graphic language.

Verse 3: “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.” The dead were piled up, and the soldiers, pursuing the few that remained alive, or greedily grabbing anything of value, stumbled over the dead. The prophet paints an accurate picture of cracking whips, thunderous war horses with pounding

hoofs trampling everything in their path, glittering swords drinking the blood of the defeated, and mountains of dead bodies. The Assyrians delighted in such carnage. They were human vultures feasting on carrion. Bloody massacre typified Assyrian victories: "Too dark ye cannot paint the sin, too small the merit show." Assyria reaps what Assyria sows.

Verse 4: "Because of the multitude of the whoredoms." Nahum is describing the sins of Assyria to show the need for her complete destruction. Nineveh was heathen to the core. Every dirty, rotten, disgusting, corrupt thing was done openly and in the daytime in old Assyria. They lacked a sense of shame. They paraded the abominations of idolatry. Witchcraft was prominent, deception admired, immorality rampant.

Verse 5: "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." A holy God could not abide such unabated, putrid, inhuman conduct. The treachery and evil were rancid. The iniquity was total, and the destruction therefore certain.

Verse 6: "And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock." God was determined to make a public example of the descendants of Asshur "that the rest may see and be in fear." When Assyria received what she had so often delivered, the nations gaped.

Verse 7: "They that look upon thee shall flee from thee." Assyria would have no friend in the hour of trial. She had proved herself faithless, and all would forsake her: "Who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?" Assyria had alienated every potential friend, and in the day of her great distress there was no one to sympathize. Instead of feeling any tinge of sorrow

at her passing, there was worldwide joy. Her grave could not be too deep to suit the nations she had abused.

Verse 8: “Art thou better than No-Amon?” The city of No, where the sun god of Egypt, Amon, was worshiped, was invaded and defeated by Assyria in the year 663 B.C. No-Amon, also called Thebes, was protected by moats filled with water from the Nile river. The moat, or sea, was her protective rampart. The Tigris River, in much the same way, protected Nineveh.

Verse 9: “Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength.” She had Put and Lubim for allies. The strength of No-Amon seemed infinite, but Assyria swept over it and destroyed it.

Verse 10: “Yet was she carried away.” The young children were “dashed in pieces.” The important men were sold as slaves. Assyria fully defeated No-Amon.

Verse 11: “Thou also shalt be drunken.” The doom of No-Amon would be the doom of Assyria: “He also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger.” In defeat the Assyrian would be in confusion and fear and would stagger like a drunkard: “Thou shalt be hid.” Nineveh was so thoroughly razed that the location was unknown until modern times. She went down to an abysmal, narrow house.

Verse 12: “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.” Assyria was ripe for destruction and would easily fall to an invading army.

Verse 13: “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.” The brave soldiers of Assyria would have no strength to defend the city. Nineveh was wide open to her enemies.

Verse 14: “Draw thee water for the siege.” Lay provisions in store against the day when you will be shut

up in your city like a bird in a cage: "Tread the mortar; make strong the brickkiln." Repair the walls. Build the strongest defense possible with the best material available.

Verse 15: "There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off; it shall devour thee like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm; make thyself many as the locust." No wall would be high or strong enough to protect Nineveh. Fire would burn to ash the bars of her gates, and the enemy would swarm over the city. The cankerworm was voracious and came by uncounted millions. Enemy soldiers would be everywhere, and would consume everything.

Verse 16: "Thou has multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm ravageth, and fleeth away." Commerce had made Nineveh wealthy, but the cankerworm would devour all her fortune: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal."

Verse 17: "Thy princes are as the locusts, and thy marshals as the swarms of grasshoppers, which encamp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are." The princes and priests of Assyria were as numerous as a swarm of locusts. Everyone was promoted to a place of prominence. Luxury, ease, and wealth were on display; and corresponding immorality and vice were conspicuous. As the locusts come suddenly, eat up everything, and disappear completely, so would Assyria drop from sight.

Verse 18: "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." The watchmen, the counselors, the defenders sleep the sleep of death. Nahum sees the city when its last war is over. The survivors flee to the mountains, where one might

well suppose they would be ashamed to admit their Assyrian bloodline. Every man's hand would be against them.

Verse 19: "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?" The fall of the savage Assyrians would be everywhere applauded. The eloquent Nahum foresees and foretells the last days of Nineveh.

CHAPTER 22

Great Lessons From The Book Of Nahum

Joe Gilmore

Introduction

T_{HE} NAME “*NAHUM*” MEANS “comforter” or “compassion.” Nahum was a prophet of God and spoke the mind of the Almighty. His nativity and age are uncertain. Nahum was called the Elkoshite. But where Elkosh was situated is certainly a disputed point. Jerome records that Elkosh was a village in Galilee. But Jerome lived nearly one thousand years after Nahum. Others suggest such places as Palestine or Capernaum may have been the home of the prophet.

The entire prophecy is aimed against Nineveh, the metropolis of Assyria. Nineveh was destroyed B.C. 606 or 612. The “vision” was seen by Nahum about one hundred years before the event took place. Nahum sounds the death-knell of the proud, luxurious, and wealthy city. He proclaims God’s goodness and announces God’s heaviest judgments. Nahum also predicts the final and complete overthrow of Nineveh.

The Goodness Of God

Nahum said, “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in him” (Nah. 1:7). We believe in the goodness of God through His Word.

God is originally and essentially good. His goodness is not derived; it is His very nature, essence, and habit. He is the spring, fountain, and source of all goodness. As He is essentially good, He is essentially God. The Scriptures proclaim constantly that God is good. David said, “The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting” (Psm. 100:5).

Good is absolutely good. In Him there is no mixture of evil (1 John 1:5). Just as He is all-wise and almighty and independent, so is He perfect and absolutely good.

God is infinitely good—good in the most immense degree. His goodness cannot be measured or circumscribed. It is as vast and boundless as His essence. All the goodness existing in angels, heavenly saints, and the godly on earth, are as a ray of light to the beams of noonday splendor, compared with the richness and abundance of the goodness of God. Consider the paths He took for man’s redemption: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). It was the goodness of God that sent His Son to redeem man.

God is incomprehensibly good. We cannot possibly conceive of that which is infinite, so that the goodness of God is higher than our thoughts: “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20).

God is immutably good. In Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17). His goodness cannot be affected either by addition or subtraction.

God is willing to pardon. A prisoner appreciates and desires executive clemency. There is the liability incurred by sin. We must make good the injury we have done. The common sentiment of the human heart demands repair. But there is man’s inability to make this repair: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in

man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). God’s willingness to pardon may be measured by what He has done to make it possible. Consider the Father’s feelings while His Son was dying on the cross. We lose sight of God at the cross, but the convulsions of nature betray His agony (Mark 14-15). He is willing to love us. A pardoned convict is anxious about the feelings of his old associates, wife, and children toward him, wondering, “Do they love me?” A gift to the beggar is not evidence that he is loved. Man is a beggar and a rebel, ungrateful and forgetful; yet God is willing to love him. (John 14:21; 3:16). Infinite goodness alone could love such a being as man and give him a plan which, when obeyed, can save him. (2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 5:8-9).

God is willing to adopt us into His family. The prince may give money to the beggar and may even speak kindly to him, but it is another thing to make him his child, to share his honors, society, knowledge, and love. But God does it:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

God is willing to make us His heirs and joint-heirs with His Son. Rarely do men make beggars their heirs. When it occurs, it usually is from some selfish motive. God is willing and has given the invitation to all who will come in accordance with His requirements: “And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17). There should not be any jealousy in God’s family when children are born into it. Satan’s success in pointing out selfishness in the family of God would defeat the mission of Christ to save the world.

God is willing to bestow eternal life. The thought of seeing heaven, of testing its holiness, is thrilling: “And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

God’s goodness should attract us to Him and bind our hearts, filling us with love. Our hearts should overflow with grateful praise.

The Things That Provoked The Divine Wrath Against Nineveh

The people of Nineveh were impenitent. More than a hundred years before Nahum, Jonah preached to Nineveh, and the whole city gave itself up to repentance. From the sovereign on the throne to the humblest subject, all united in confession, humiliation, and earnest appeal to God for mercy. But great as was the result of Jonah’s preaching at the time, it was not permanent. A brief period served to blot out the memory of the doom which that prophet announced and which was averted by their contrition and humiliation. They turned again with redoubled zest to their old, brutal customs. The repentance was not followed by any lasting amendment of life. Hence, as always happens in like cases, their last end was worse than the first.

Assyrian pride got in the way. It was proverbial. The insolent message of Sennacherib to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13) was but a specimen of it. Nahum lived and prophesied at the time when the arrogance of Assyria reached its climax. God and His laws were despised, and the rights of men and nations were trampled on by the haughty power.

Assyrian cruelty was also proverbial (Nah. 3:1-3). Nineveh is called “the bloody city.” In it the hiss of the whip and heavy sound of the scourge were constantly

heard. Rarely did the Assyrians show mercy to the conquered and the captive. It was their custom to stamp out their foes, leaving no vestige of city or hamlet behind. In the excavations made at Nineveh, the evidences of cruelty are abundant. This was cruelty of the most barbarous sort. A common method of torture was to flay their victims alive. Nahum represents their ferocity as that of the lion (2:11-12).

The Assyrians were given to idolatry. It was of the most degrading kind, and, as is always the case, witchcraft, sorcery, and demon worship were associated with it. There were found those strange, hideous composite figures which were the principal idols of Assyria. The body of their idol was that of a bull or a lion; the head and the face were human. Two immense wings were attached to the shoulders.

Assyria oppressed God's people, Israel. While God used Assyria as His rod to punish the stubborn and rebellious ten tribes, He nevertheless held them responsible for their deeds. Assyria, like Babylon and Persia, did exceed all just bounds in its dealings with its captives. God judged Assyria for these things.

Nahum Described The Destruction Of Nineveh

It was predicted that "with an overrunning flood He will make an utter end of the place" (1:8). The illusion is to an invading army, no doubt that of the Medes and Babylonians, who attacked Nineveh and completely demolished it.

The Tigris was to assist in its overthrow (2:6). This was fulfilled. The ancient historian, Diodorus Siculus, mentions an old prophecy that Nineveh would not be taken until the river (Tigris) should become its enemy. He adds that, when the assailants attacked it, the river burst its banks and washed away the wall.

It was to be destroyed by fire (3:13, 15). This, too, was literally fulfilled. In the excavations which have been made on the site, it was discovered that one of the gates and most of the buildings had been burned.

The population was to be surprised when unprepared: “while they are drunk as drunkards they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry” (1:10). Siculus states that the last and fatal assault was made when they were overcome with wine. In the remains that have been exhumed, carousing scenes are represented, in which the king, his courtiers, and even the queen, reclining on couches or seated on thrones, and attended by musicians, appear to be drinking bowls of wine.

Nineveh was to be despoiled of its idols (1:14); and of its silver and gold (2:9). This prediction was also fulfilled. The images of Nineveh were swept away, either destroyed or carried off by the conquerors. Enormous amounts of gold and silver were conveyed to Ecbatana by the victorious Medes. Very little of the precious metals have been found in the excavations of recent times. The city was spoiled of all its treasures.

The captivity of the inhabitants and their removal to distant provinces were announced. (2:7; 3:18). The place was depopulated and the proud city sank into a mass of ruins and rubbish.

Nineveh was to disappear and become a perpetual desolation (1:14; 3:19). For centuries its site has been an arid waste of yellow sand. Every trace of its existence disappeared for ages. Two hundred years after its capture, Xenophon, in the retreat of the ten thousand, passed near it, saw the ruins, but knew not what they were, and did not so much as learn the name of Nineveh.

Herodotus visited the spot and all he said was, “The Tigris was the river upon which Nineveh formerly stood.” For centuries the only sound heard in its vicinity was the

lonely cry of the jackal and hoarse growl of the hyena. God had said by the mouth of His servant the prophet, "I will make thy grave." He did just that. Wide and deep He did dig it; low and deep He buried Nineveh, never more to rise again, save to be gazed at with curious eyes amid dim touchlight by the archaeologist, whose pick and spade have confirmed the Lord's predictions!

CHAPTER 23

Introduction To The Book Of Habakkuk

Stephen Wiggins

Introduction

THE BOOK OF *HABAKKUK* is a part of the Divine revelation from God to man. And, since it is a part of the canon of Scriptures, the Holy Bible, the inspired Word of God, it is thus profitable and beneficial for our study (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Prophet

Nothing certain is known about Habakkuk as a person other than his name and the fact that he is called “the prophet” (Hab. 1:1; 3:1). There is no information at all in the Bible concerning his life, occupation, parentage, place of birth, or anything else. The name “Habakkuk” means “to embrace” and occurs only twice in the Bible, both times in the book bearing his name. Habakkuk lived in the seventh century and prophesied concerning Judah’s fall to Babylon, which took place in 606 B.C.

The Book

The revelation of God to Habakkuk is called a “burden” (Heb. **massa**, as used in the prophets, an “oracle”), which the prophet did “see” (Hab. 1:1). His book is really unique among all the books of the “minor prophets,” for it

is written in the style of complaint and answer. While other prophets plead with the people on behalf of God, Habakkuk pleads with God on behalf of the people (1:2; 2:1). Instead of Habakkuk taking God's message directly to the people, he takes the complaint of the people to God.

Habakkuk begins by asking God why sin is being tolerated among His people Judah (1:1-4). The reply comes that the Lord is raising up the Chaldeans (i.e., Babylon) to punish His people (1:5-11). This then leads to Habakkuk's second question of how God could use a people even more wicked and ungodly such as the Babylonians to punish his chosen people, Judah (1:12-2:1). The answer is given that Babylon will also be punished in its turn (2:2-20). The book ends with Habakkuk's prayer of praise and confident faith in the Lord (3:1-19). Note the following expanded outline of the book.

The Outline

- I. The first question of Habakkuk and God's answer (1:1-11).
 - A. The prophet's first question: how long will God allow this wickedness to continue among His people (1:2-4)?
 - B. God's first reply: God is raising up the Chaldeans to punish the evildoers (1:5-11).

- II. The second question of Habakkuk and God's answer (1:12).
 - A. The prophet's reaction to God's first reply (1:12).
 - B. The prophet's second question: how can God use such a cruel power as the Chaldeans to punish His people who are less wicked (1:13-14)?
 - C. God's second reply: God will also bring His second judgment upon the ungodly Chaldeans. Note especially the five-fold "woe" pronounced upon the ungodly Chaldeans in verses 6, 9, 12, 15, 19 (2:1-20).

- III. Habakkuk's prayer of praise to the mighty God of Israel (3:1-15).
 - A. The prophet's reaction to the vision: "I am afraid" (3:1-2).
 - B. The prophet recalls past manifestations (theophanies) of God (3:3-15).
- IV. Habakkuk's reaction to the vision and his declaration of faith in God (3:16-19)
 - A. The prophet trembles as he considers the things revealed to him by God (3:16-19).
 - B. The prophet's declares an undying faith in God (3:17-18).
 - C. Jehovah, the Lord, will deliver the faithful and make them walk in high places (i.e., He will raise them up from the depths of destruction—3:19).

The Date

The most probable date of Habakkuk's prophetic activity is somewhere between 612 and 606 B.C. The prophet seems to have prophesied shortly before the rise of the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) to power. The date of prophecy is fixed in relation to the statement in Habakkuk 1:6: "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs." When Habakkuk spoke these words, the Chaldeans had not yet invaded Judah. When Habakkuk spoke, Nebuchadnezzar was already pressing westward in his conquest but had not yet reached Jerusalem. We know this because Habakkuk says that he must wait for the coming invasion: "Because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble, for the coming of the people that invadeth us" (3:16). Since Assyria fell to Babylon in 612 B.C. and Babylon invaded Judah in 606 B.C., it seems certain that the book should be dated

within that period. This being true, it means that Habakkuk uttered his prophecies during the reign of Jehoiakim, one of most godless and tyrannical kings ever to reign over God's people (2 Kings 23:34ff). This would also make Habakkuk a contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 1:3).

Habakkuk And The New Testament

1. **Habakkuk 1:5**: "Behold ye among the nations, and look, and wonder marvelously; for I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you." In Acts 13:41, while at Antioch of Pisidia, the apostle Paul quotes this verse and applies the principle of God's dealings in Habakkuk's day to the situation in the church of his own day. God's work of calling the Gentiles into the church was just as astonishing and perplexing to the Jews in the first century as his work of using the ungodly Babylonians to punish Judah in the seventh century B.C. Paul's meaning was that the Jews who would not believe that God was calling Gentiles would themselves perish in their stubbornness and unbelief.

2. **Habakkuk 2:4**: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." Here Habakkuk teaches that the just person would live by his faith/faithfulness. In effect, Habakkuk was told that God would always be true to Himself in delivering the person who maintains his integrity and keeps the Divine commandments; that is, the Israelite who remains unswerving in his loyalty to God, though he may suffer, will survive if he is faithful. This passage is quoted three times in the New Testament.

In Paul's writings, the idea of being justified by faith takes its antithesis to being justified by the works of the Law of Moses (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). And, when the Hebrews writer saw the Roman invasion approaching, he

saw a parallel destruction of Jewish order in his day and so appealed to this passage. As in Habakkuk's day, so in his, "the righteous one shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38). In the New Testament, faith or faithfulness is a broad principle which entails trusting God in all things and following the path He marks with Divine truth. Christians are people who "walk by faith" rather than by their own self-willed ways (2 Cor. 5:7). Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century reformer, erroneously developed the idea that being justified by faith was justification by faith only. This thought, however, introduces a new idea which is foreign to Habakkuk, Paul, or any other Biblical writer.

3. Habakkuk 2:14: "For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." Though not explicitly quoted by any New Testament writer, this idea beautifully expresses the universality of Gospel (cf. Isa. 11:9; Mark 16:15; Col. 1:23; Heb. 8:11).

Lessons For Today

Romans 15:4 makes it clear that the things written aforetime were written for our learning. This is no less true for Habakkuk. Note some of the following lessons that should be learned by all today.

1. **"The Lord is in his holy temple:** let all the earth keep silence before him" (2:20; cf. Psm. 11:4). This is one of the most familiar passages in Habakkuk. Jehovah God is on His heavenly throne. He is in complete control and all are to silently submit to His divine rule and judgment. All are amenable to God's rule and someday must individually give an account of the way in which we have lived our lives here on earth (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

2. **Wickedness is self-destructive:** This fact is emphasized by Habakkuk. The Lord points out this principle to His prophet in the five woes pronounced upon

the sinful character of the Chaldeans (2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19). Their sins were degrading and destructive and so renounced by the Lord. If the righteous will but be patient and endure with steadfastness, a triumphant victory will be theirs in the end (Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:9).

3. The certain doom of the sinful: Sometimes it may appear that evil is victorious, but, as surely as there is a God in heaven, so He will bring His judgment upon those who live in rebellion to His will. This was true for both Judah and Babylon. God does not and will not allow sin to go unpunished (Gal. 6:7-8; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 21:8).

4. The supremacy of God: The book of Habakkuk declares much about God, especially His supremacy. God is supreme (1) in holiness (1:12-13), (2) in judgment (1:2-4), (3) over nations (1:5; 3:6, 12), (4) over nature (3:3-11), (5) over the courses of history (2:3, 3:2), and (6) over all the earth (2:20).

5. “The righteous shall live by faith” (2:4): “Faith” for Habakkuk does not refer merely to an act in the mind of mental assent, but it carries with it all that is involved in trust, assurance, and steadfastness. It involves giving oneself to God without reservation and living one’s life in harmony with the Divine will.

6. Courage in time of crisis: Habakkuk encourages us to be courageous and happy in spite of adversity. In difficult times, we find it difficult to manifest the courage which should be characteristic of God’s people. The prophet counsels us not to be afraid but to be patient for the wonderful promises in store for God’s people.

7. Divine discipline: The book of Job discusses the suffering of an individual and points out, among other things, the disciplinary value of suffering (Job 32:1-37:24). In Habakkuk, it is the suffering of a nation. Nevertheless, if suffering has value for an individual, it also has value for a nation.

CHAPTER 24

Commentary On The Book Of Habakkuk

Bill Lockwood

Introduction

EACH BOOK OF THE BIBLE has a variant of rich color to offer all diligent seekers. Habakkuk, to many an unfamiliar work by a prophet contemporary with Jeremiah, perhaps during the reign of Jehoiakim, springs to life and deals with some of the most perplexing questions in life. A careful study yields a bountiful harvest, and “the embracer is likely to be embraced.”¹

The faith of the righteous is emphasized herein and is perhaps best exemplified by Habakkuk himself who travels the difficult road of faith. The righteous of Judah are far in the minority in this late hour, and God seems not to care. Habakkuk expresses this to God, but God’s answer drives him to even deeper perplexity. Finally, however, he will emerge victorious, as one whose “faith has been tried by fire,” for, even though the message of doom causes his lips to quiver, his faith is able to “walk upon the high places” as he rejoices in the God of his salvation (Hab. 3:18-19). Perhaps our faith should tread Habakkuk’s path.

The book was written in colloquial form—a dialogue between Habakkuk and God—and ends in a chapter of praise. Chapter one, verse two begins with the words spoken by Habakkuk to God. The complaint he brings

before the throne of grace is that the “wicked compass about the righteous” in Judah. The prophet seems not to understand why God remains idle while Judah is steeped in sin. His bursting forth in the complaint indicates that he had, for some time previous to speaking, mulled over the problem. It was a more desperate one than we, at first, may realize. For the circumstances seemed to contradict his idea of the righteous government and protection of God.

Let it be noted that Habakkuk stated his problem to God rather than allowing it to become the occasion of disbelief. He wanted God to make explanation. It appears that even many Christians today relish difficulties found on the pathway of faith. If they would sit still long enough for God to answer their questions by this Word, He would do so. Instead they shout them from rooftops as excuses for fashioning a new theology.

Complaints And Answers

Habakkuk moans of the wickedness and violence he witnesses about him in seventh-century Judah (1:2-4). God allows him to “look upon perverseness” (v. 3) and is apparently doing little to aid the problem: “thou wilt not save” (v. 2). We also tend to puzzle that God seems to be oblivious to current affairs. In this we are always wrong. With our limited vision, we should never suppose our God idle. Instead of being inactive, God was “working a work which ye will not believe though it be told you” (1:5-11). The Lord points to the events transpiring in heathen nations about them.

The Assyrian empire, whom God used as the “rod of his anger” to punish the northern kingdom, began to crumble. A Chaldean prince named Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) arose and struck for independence in the East. He defeated the Assyrians outside of Babylon in October, 626 and conquered the city. In a few short years Assyria

was fighting for her life. Nahum prophesied: “Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour...the voice of thy messengers shall be heard no more” (Nah. 2:13). In the last desperate hour, Assyria found an ally in Egypt.

Egyptian forces under Necho arrived in Mesopotamia in 618. By 614 the Medes entered the picture and aided Nabopolassar. Within two short years, these allies assaulted Nineveh and, after short siege activity, devastated the city. Nahum pictures its death-throes as Babylon breached the city’s walls: “The chariots rage in the streets, they rush to and fro in the broad ways” (2:4). This does not speak of twentieth-century automobile traffic as some pretend they believe but is a painting of Nineveh.

Judah, meanwhile, under the milksoppishness of froward Jehoiakim, had become a vassal of Egypt. But events were changing. In 607/606, Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar were campaigning in the Armenian mountains and the horizons for Judah began to darken. After skirmishing with Egypt for some time, Nebuchadnezzar fell upon Egypt at Carchemish in 605 and sent it reeling in defeat. A second, more crushing blow was delivered near Haran.

God’s answer to the prophet (Hab. 1:5-11) is, in essence, “Look at the world events!” God was raising up the Chaldeans to punish Judah for the crimes confessed by Habakkuk. The arm of the Lord is now laid bare to the prophet (cf. Isa. 52:10). The Chaldean character is given in verses six and seven. It is even said that their judgments proceed from themselves—they make their own rules.

Now, to Habakkuk, Assyrian cruelty was feared, but Babylonian butchery was dreaded. More so, Habakkuk was displeased with the answer because, though Judah was sinful, Babylon was more so, and it seemed unjust to use such a nation to punish another more righteous than she!

The Chaldeans were even a law unto themselves! Let us also be careful in demanding an answer from God lest we find it more crushing to us than the initial enigma. Consequently, he responds to God, in 1:12-17, with the climax in verse thirteen:

Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold
evil...wherefore lookest thou upon them that
deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when
the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more
righteous than he?

Why, the Chaldeans treated captives as one would fish of the sea (v. 14)—as having no rights. In a figurative fashion, Habakkuk shows in verses fifteen and sixteen how the Chaldeans mercilessly capture their prey and then worship their own military skill.

I have tried to imagine how Habakkuk felt at this answer of God. The following illustration, though not parallel, might demonstrate it to our minds.

America began as the land of the free. This allowed free course to religion. The Lord's church unfolded here as from a mustard seed to grow into a mighty tree. By the 1840s, we were the fourth largest religious group in America. America truly was the land of God's choosing. But digression tore our skirts and cast us in the dust. Only a million members were left faithful in 1906. Our laborers began once again with diligence to rebuild. By the 1950s, we were counted as the fastest growing religious group in America. But apostasy once again set in as disease in a body. In our nausea our growth ceased, and we are now beginning to spew forth once-faithful members to the four winds. The disease is leaving us limp. I pray for God's swift action daily that we may begin the road to recovery and rebuilding. O that we may see our former glory! What if God were to answer our prayers thusly:

I am working a work in your days which ye will not believe though it be told you; for I am raising up an African and Far Eastern nation to be “my chosen nation,” to nourish in freedom my church. **They** will carry on the Restoration Principle since it is failing in America to produce a large vibrant body. The church **in America** will never again be great but go into captivity. Within fifty years my missionaries will come to America to plant and to build.

We are likely to respond: “That doesn’t seem right! We are the chosen nation to ‘Christianize’ the foreigners. Bless us again, O God!” Now perhaps we feel the pain of Habakkuk when he cried for correction of evils but received the message of complete destruction: “I will wait to see what Jehovah will answer me,” he says as he stands upon his watchtower (2:1).

The Lord’s answer comes in 2:2, and Habakkuk is to write it down on tablets for eternal remembrance. The one who reads it will run to tell it. God’s purpose was set for the “appointed time.” God likens the answer to an animal that pants for its fulfillment, and “it will surely come” (2:3).

Note that God prophesies things for a certain future time, and it is the foolish notion of premillennialism which supposes that such prophecies can be postponed to another time. God says His Word will be “for the appointed time,” but confused premillennialists think similar predictions failed and were put off until another time!

God admits that Babylon **is** unrighteous as asserted by Habakkuk (2:4a), but “the righteous shall live by faith.” This being the theme of Habakkuk, as well as the keynote of the New Testament, let’s examine it for a moment.

The Righteous Shall Live By Faith

The complaint of Habakkuk was that the righteous were to be swallowed up by the wicked. God’s answer shows that the righteous shall live—that is, be preserved from

destruction on the condition that he remain faithful. Here, “faith” refers to faithfulness. It was a principle upon which God had always blessed man, Abraham being the first great example (Gen. 15:6). God has always counted as justified the ones who exemplify true faith in Him. Habakkuk need not fear.

First, note Bible faith. Our understanding is enriched from the Old Testament. Abraham’s faith was counted by God for his justification. But what constitutes “faith”? Note that Genesis 15:6 was only spoken after years of Abraham’s obedience to God: leaving Ur, coming to Canaan, worshiping God. Why, if Abraham had merely said “I believe,” but had never obeyed, he would never have been justified. All denominations dislike this essential truth by equating faith with a simple mental belief and that before any acts of obedience. They do not even know what is faith in the Bible sense:

Indeed, if many modern evangelical preachers would give to the word “faith” the meaning which the Hebrew word bears, there would be less superficiality in the profession and practice of Christianity.²

Abraham, Paul and Habakkuk teach us the lesson that the denominational idea is **no faith**. Paul reiterates the lesson in Hebrews 4:2, 6. He says the Israelites did not enter the land of Canaan because their hearing the Word of God was not united by faith. But, in verse 6, he says they were left out because of disobedience: no obedience, no faith. The same principle is true throughout the Bible.

Second, the Old Testament system in relationship to Habakkuk 2:4 is seen. Paul gives the Judaizing teachers in Galatians 3 a good lesson in the Law by quoting this verse and pointing out that the Law **itself** simply condemned men because of a failure to keep its precept (v. 12). His point

is that the Law **in and of itself**, upon which the Judaizing teachers would have to rely, was never capable of justifying man. Rather, faithfulness to God by faithful (not flawless!) keeping of His Law was rewarded. This was God's grace to the Old Testament faithful expressed in Habakkuk 2:4. The Old Testament worthies were reminded, however, upon a yearly basis that the ultimate sacrifice for sin was still future (Heb. 10:3). Faith was the vital principle.

Third, the New Testament Law in relation to Habakkuk 2:4. We are reminded upon regular intervals, as they were in the Old Testament, that our expiation is found at the cross (in weekly appointments at the Lord's table). At this sacrifice of Christ, the Old Law was removed and the New instituted. Today, faithfulness to God by a faithful (not flawless) keeping of His Law is rewarded by eternal salvation. Judaizing teachers were not going to like this. They failed to realize the Law of Moses was done away as God's remedial system since it was only preparatory to the New Law. They also failed to understand that justification was never granted through the Law of Moses **in and of itself**, but the Law was rather a curse upon man as a witness against him (Gal. 3:6-11). Further, God had planned the Gospel system in Abraham's promises (3:8), even though, according to infidelic viewpoints, Habakkuk "was re-interpreted in the New Testament by Paul in his doctrine of justification by faith."³

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17, and Galatians 3:11, to establish that God had always demanded **faith** as His plan to justify man. The ones who have faith, these are the ones who shall live eternally.

In Hebrews 10:37-38, the writer again quotes Habakkuk 2:4 and emphasizes another aspect of the principle. He urged the Hebrews onto faithful living: maintain your faithfulness as in the former days (10:32).

We paraphrase 10:38: “The righteous man, **remaining** in his faith, shall have life, but he who faints in difficulty shall not” (emp. mine, BL)

In Romans and Galatians, the emphasis is upon faith as justification before God. In Hebrews it is upon the fortitude that faith provides to endure trials. Habakkuk 2:4 is therefore the unchanging principle of the Lord’s relationship with his people.

The Five Woes

These are directed against the Chaldean oppressor. They are arranged in the Hebrew in five stanzas of three verses each. They are taken up and uttered by all the nations who suffered at the Chaldean hand.

First, 2:6-8. Babylon loads herself with property of other nations. She had plundered as an exacting usurer would accumulate pledges contrary to the Law of Moses. But the spoiler would be spoiled!

Second, 2:9-11. Like Edom (Jer. 49:16), whose capital was nestled in the mountainous high country in Mount Seir, the Babylonians thought to set their capital as a “nest on high” to protect it. But the Chaldean sin is witnessed by the inanimate beams in the walls, and they cry out as Abel’s blood (Gen. 4:10) against her.

Third, 2:12-14. The Chaldean oppression that built cities in violence and by captive labor is denounced. But God assures them that all their labor to carve an empire is vain because God has reserved it for fire. All empires of men strive for universal dominion. Yet the only empire of these proportions is a spiritual one and verse fourteen portends, like Isaiah 11:9, the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.

Incidentally, modernism in our schools teaches us that the Old Testament prophecies “must have had meaning for people of that time” and consequently explain

such predictions as simply a reference to current affairs which New Testament writers lifted out of context to apply to something for which it was never intended. Some professors have denied that **any** prophecy of such a book as Isaiah was an intended application to the Messiah or any New Testament occurrence (i.e. Isa. 7:14; 9:6; et al.)! We think Peter, however, to be a more informed expositor of Old Testament prophecies, especially as he had the Spirit of God to guide him, and he informs us that they wrote things which they did not even understand and that the Old Testament prophets ministered **to us** (1 Pet. 1:10-12). He even goes so far as to say that angels wished to learn about the Old Testament predictions. I suppose angels were not schooled in modernism, which says that every prophecy must have an apropos application to the Old Testament contemporaries! Again, if the angels had had the “new hermeneutic” in heaven, they would have known better than to come away from the Old Testament thinking that it had an intended application which they did not understand. They would have known that “what it means to me” is the correct approach! Pshaw!

Fourth, 2:15-17. Babylon is shameful in treatment of weaker nations, set in the figure of giving his neighbor poisonous drink:

The besotted drunkard wallowing on the ground is a striking image of an outwitted and conquered enemy; and the uncovering of nakedness is a term specially used in reference to shameful defeat.⁴

To Babylon, Habakkuk warns that the “cup of Jehovah’s right hand will be turned unto thee” and “foul shame,” which is literally “shameful spewing,” will be Babylon’s disgrace. What a putrid picture! It was no coincidence that Babylon was taken while in a drunken feast.

Fifth, 2:18-20. The guilt of the Chaldeans lay primarily in her idolatry. She fashions them herself from wood or stone and then ridiculously worships the figure. Isaiah shows at length (ch. 44) a similar picture of the process of men making an idol and then praying to the image they themselves had created. It has been said that the prophets of old are at their best when exposing the senseless delusions of idol worship. It behooves all to worship the only living God who is present where He is worshipped properly (Hab. 2:20).

Poem Of Prayer And Praise

Most modernists believe chapter three comes from another hand and was added to chapters one and two in its process of growth.⁵ We, however, prefer the New Testament view that it was God-breathed and prefer to think God allowed it to be called “a prayer of Habakkuk” because it actually was so. The prayer was designed for public worship as seen from the musical notation “Selah” in verses three, nine, and thirteen. In this prayer, Habakkuk (1) recalls God’s past actions of power, (2) prays for speedy deliverance, and (3) expresses confidence in the unchangeableness of God.

The prayer is said to be set to the Shigionoth:

The plural form of the word shiggaion, which occurs only once, in inscription of the seventh Psalm, a psalm like this hymn, “remarkable for vivacity, rapid and vigorous transitions, and vivid imagery.” The meaning and etymology are somewhat doubtful, but critics now generally agree that it denotes a lyrical poem composed under strong mental excitement, the dithyrambic of the Greek. Here we have deep intense feeling passing rapidly through all the phases of spiritual emotion; imagery unsurpassed for vividness and splendor, nature in dismay and amazement raised into the sphere of life, sentient, sympathizing or awestruck at the

manifestation of Divine power and wrath; clear realization of past and future judgment, the whole crowned by an expression of perfect, unshaken trust.⁶

Habakkuk was not a passive spectator of the destruction of Judah; it struck him with fear and stirred his depths as a sober contemplation thereof will do for all of us. He beseeches God to “revive his work” (3:2) of grace to Israel and, in His wrath, “remember mercy.”

The prophet now sees future salvation in past events (v. 3b). God’s greatness as seen in the past blessings is so great that he says God’s “rays” come forth from His hand. In the Hebrew, “rays” is “horns.” God’s greatness is pictured here in the dawning sky over the Judean hills, and the streaks of glowing orange light glinting through the sky before the sunrise reminded the Jews of a gazelle’s horns. Jehovah sends these forth with His hand, Habakkuk says, and **there**, in the brightness of the sun, not in darkness, our God hides (see 1 John 1:6-7).

As pestilence and plagues visited Judah’s enemies in the past, so in the future will He accomplish His purposes (Hab. 3:5). Fiery bolts of “burning heat” (v. 5b) went forth at his feet. One can picture the streaks of lightning, which Habakkuk perhaps intended to refer to with such destructions in the back of his mind as occurred to Sennacherib’s army.

In verse six the prophet sees the Lord stop His march through the earth and measure it with His all-seeing eye. This is the calm before the storm. He then causes great upheavals in the earth as he drives the nations (v. 6) and even scatters the mountains as dust before Him. The mountains bowed in reverence to God. His ways are always accompanied by great power (v. 6b).

When God escorted Israel into Canaan, the nations were struck with fear. Note that Habakkuk himself is still

the speaker as he thinks on the former judgments. Cush (perhaps the Cushan Rishathaim of Judges 3:8) trembled at the advance. The Midianites, on the Arabian coast of the Red Sea, were affrightened. The nomad tribes were in terror of such an extermination as befell the Midianites (mentioned in Psalm 83 and Isaiah 9:4). When God marches in the earth, even the rivers and seas retreat (Nile, Jordan, and the Red Sea—Hab. 3:8). Of course, it was for the salvation of God's elect. The question form here of direct address to God portrays the alarm at such manifestations of greatness as was felt by Habakkuk. "The chariots of salvation" (3:8b) are the chariots of God, His angelic host upon which He rides. According to Psalm 104:3-4, the clouds and the winds serve as His vehicles.

As God draws near to the enemy upon His chariots, the bow is drawn forth from the sheath. In Egyptian tradition the warrior suspended himself from the side of his car as he readies his aim. The oath of God (Hab. 3:9) was the salvation of His people.

In 3:10, the mountains are shaking with fear and terror at the sight of the Avenger. The literal rendering here is that the mountains are trembling in pain. How fearful our God! "The deep uttered its voice" refers to the deafening roar of the ocean (see Psm. 77:16). The waters crash forth as a mourner with uplifted hands imploring the mercy of God.

God's intervention reminds Habakkuk in 3:11 of the miracle at Gibeon (Josh. 10:12). The magnificent figure here shows the sun and moon withdrawing themselves from Divine terror, and one can feel the thick darkness which accompanies God's moving in the affairs of men. The sun and moon hide themselves from the flashing forth of God's power—His lightning spears.

The object of God's going forth was to "thresh the nations" (Hab. 3:12), with the ultimate purpose being the

salvation of His people (3:13). Most importantly, God moves among the nations “For victory with thine anointed” (footnote, ASV). Habakkuk probably was pointing to the Messiah, since Jeremiah prophesied that Coniah (Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim) is “a despised broken vessel” and “no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling in Judah” (Jer. 22:28-30). Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was always considered to be a usurper by Ezekiel. Ezekiel knew that Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and his descendants were the rightful heirs to David’s throne. He tells us therefore in 21:26-27 of Ezekiel: “Remove the mitre, take off the crown...I will overturn, overturn, overturn it...until he come whose right it is.” So Christ was to be the priest and king on the throne of David (Zech. 6:12-13), and Habakkuk states all the movements of God in history are for establishing the “anointed” (Hab. 3:13).

God will wound the head of Babylon and “lay bare the neck” of the Chaldeans. It reminds the prophet of the Lord’s work at the Red Sea (3:15), when the waters stood up “in a heap.” Is there a God like our God?

Habakkuk’s terror and dread at the coming anguish of his people is vividly described (3:16-17). It had perhaps seemed as just yesterday when they had entered the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of promise and hope where the soil continued to produce and the wine-presses flowed freely amidst the shout of laughter of Hebrew workmen who had been blessed by God. But now the olive would “fail,” and the “fields shall yield no food.” However, in his tears of sadness for the slain daughter of God’s people, he was able to utter the final words of praise: “Yet, I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:18).

It is only through the probation of earthly strife and sorrow that our faith, if it is strong enough to feed us

man in the wilderness of doubt, cause us in despair to drink from the brook Cherith, guide us in the shadows of apostasy where the wicked doth compass about the righteous, and even succor us in the shadow of death as the grim reaper visits our beloved, can emerge victorious. And **only** after such trials can we realize the wisdom in God's allowing us to struggle. For it is a faith "proved by fire," now seen to be a "vessel of honor, meet for the master's use," that is useful in God's service. Only then will we perceive that He has indeed loved us until the end and caused us "to walk upon the high places."

Endnotes

1 The name "Habakkuk" means "the embracer, one who embraces," as one would a weeping child "to quiet it with the assurance that, if God wills, it shall soon be better." Charles Feinberg, **The Minor Prophets** (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1980), p. 205.

2 David Keff in the **Wycliffe Bible Commentary**, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer & Everett F. Harrison (Chicago Moody Bible Institute: The Southwestern Company, 1968), p. 877.

3 Bernhard W. Anderson, **Understanding the Old Testament**, 4th edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), p. 390.

4 F. Canon Cook, **The Bible Commentary**, ed. F. C. Cook, Volume 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981 reprint), p. 668.

5 Anderson, **Understanding the Old Testament**, p. 388, footnote 33. See also Brevard Childs, **Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 451. "Chapter 3 is introduced by a title and concluded with a type of colophon which would seem to indicate an independent existence of this poem at some stage in its prehistory. However, it has been reworked into the book so skillfully as to form again a unified section." This is the historical-critical approach which, in the name of placing emphasis upon the human element, considers the Bible a product of evolutionary development.

6 Cook, p. 670.

CHAPTER 25

Great Lessons From The Book Of Habakkuk

M. H. Tucker

Introduction

DOES THE PROPHET *HABAKKUK* present a message which you consider dry and dull? Do you think of him as addressing ancient issues which have little relevance today? Then reconsider! Today, we are seeing in America what Habakkuk saw in Judah about 600 B.C.

He saw wickedness, “destruction,” “violence,” “strife,” “contention,” laxity of the Law, and perversion of justice (Hab. 1:2-4). So this ancient book may not be as antiquated as you first thought. Christians may find answers to those troubling questions about God’s involvement in history and His people. Even if specific answers are not found, we may, at least, learn “that he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psm. 121:4).

Perplexity Of The Prophet

The prophet could not understand why God permitted evil to continue unabated. He prayed about it, but God did not seem to hear:

O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?...Why dost thou shew me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention (Hab. 1:2-4).

Habakkuk's question is for all times and places. He was neither the first nor the last to be perplexed by the seeming indifference of God toward wickedness. Good, righteous men and women in every age have been puzzled by the "silence of God."

(1) Gideon inquired, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judg. 6:13).

(2) Job asked, "Wherefore do the wicked prosper, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" (Job 21:7).

(3) Jeremiah lamented, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jer. 12:1).

(4) Centuries later, the "souls of them that were slain for the word of God" echoed Habakkuk's cry: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:9-10). Notice that all of these were men who had faith in Jehovah, but they were greatly troubled about the apparent indifference of God toward the forces of evil.

Today, men ask, "Why does God allow a few to plunge the world into a global conflict? How much longer must the hostages in Lebanon remain the captives of a ruthless, calloused people? How much longer will drug cartels and the liquor industry lay waste our nation, wreck our homes, and numb our minds?" And maybe we say under our breath, "Why doesn't God step in with a 'few well-placed funerals'?" Or, in the words of the psalmist, which seem less caustic, "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living" (Psm. 69:28).

Perception Of God

God has not been sitting idly on the sidelines. His perception is infinite: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth" (2 Chron. 16:9). He sees all. He knows the end from the beginning. We see, as it were,

“through a knot hole.” Our perspective is limited. We cannot see the future, and we often forget history, but the sovereign God is “in every place, beholding good and evil” (Prov. 15:3).

God reveals His plan to the prophet: “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard and wonder marvelously; for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Hab. 1:5). God is totally aware of Judah’s sins. He saw wickedness in Noah’s day and brought “in the flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:5). He heard the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them “into ashes” (2:6). God is still in charge; nothing is out of His control. He remains the “general manager” of the universe, both natural and spiritual. His “hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isa. 59:1).

The problem expressed in the prophecy of Habakkuk bears a striking resemblance to the poetry of James Russell Lowell:

Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne—
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above his own.

The Plan Of God

God is now ready to reveal His plan to Habakkuk, a plan which the prophet would not believe: “For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs” (Hab. 1:6). And march through it they did! Within a short time (606 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar began his move west and besieged Jerusalem, taking into captivity many of the Jews (Dan. 1:1-2). This plan of God to chastise His people through a

nation which was not His people seemed out of character with God. How could God punish His people with a rod as evil as the Chaldeans? With dismay, Habakkuk asked, “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Hab. 1:13).

God’s answer—at least the heart of the answer—is found in one verse: “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by faith” (2:4).

There is both a negative and positive side in God’s answer. The negative side takes the form of five woes upon Babylon (2:6-20). The Medes were to become “the rod of God’s anger” against Babylon. Earlier, Isaiah wrote, “Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them” (Isa. 13:17). God’s providential hand moved against proud Babylon, and she became “as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (13:19).

The fulfillment of this prophecy confirms so many of God’s timeless principles in dealing with unrighteous nations or persons.

1. God’s ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). Through the ages He has used strange and unlearned-of instruments to accomplish His purposes.

2. “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:17). When puzzled and perplexed about world events, it is consoling to know that God is not swayed by history. His throne is above the world and He controls history.

3. “Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). It is neither military might, political skill, nor balanced budgets which give a nation security. The moral and spiritual strength of a nation is the true indicator of its ability to stand.

4. “God is not slack concerning his promises” (2 Pet. 3:9). His Divine purposes move gradually, but surely.

His train never runs late: “at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it” (Hab. 2:3). Someone has said, “God does not pay at the end of every day, but at the end he pays”:

Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceedingly small,
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.

The positive side of God’s answer is a marked contrast to the utter desolation which Babylon experienced: “The just shall live by faith” (2:4b). In our darkest hour, when we are perplexed, when “the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things,” faith in God and His Word is our tower of strength.

Faith is the key when our prayers seem to go unanswered. Faith is the key to enduring suffering and affliction. Faith is the key to the apparent triumph of evil forces. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Daniel, who was a victim of the Babylonian captivity, lived by faith and was exalted by God, while his proud captor, Nebuchadnezzar, was brought low.

Praise Of The Prophet

Habakkuk refuses to believe that God was limited in either power or love. Unlike the dumb idols in whom there was no breath, the prophet acknowledged, “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20).

Praise is given to God for His past intervention in bringing His people out of Egypt into the land of promise. Since God delivered His people once, the prophet believed that He would do it again.

The book opened with perplexity and gloom but ends with praise and glory. In Habakkuk 3:17-18, the prophet

states that, though the fruit trees fail and the fields yield no harvest, “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Though centuries have come and gone since Habakkuk’s day, God has not changed. Riches may fly away, strength may wane, and governments may topple, but God “abideth faithful” (2 Tim. 2:13). When we don’t have all the answers, let us trust God and learn to pray, “Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me.”

CHAPTER 26

Introduction To The Book Of Zephaniah

Clarence Lavender

The Man

ZEPHANIAH MEANS “JEHOVAH HIDES,” “Jehovah has hidden,” or “treasured.” He was the ninth in order of the minor prophets, who prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem in the time of King Josiah (Zeph. 1:1). He labored with Josiah in reestablishing the worship of God in the land. His age is unknown, but it is thought that he prophesied between the years 642 and 611 B.C.; and the portion of his prophecy which refers to the destruction of the Assyrian empire (2:13-15) must have been delivered prior to the year 625 B.C., the year in which Nineveh fell. It is suggested by some that Zephaniah had for his colleagues Jeremiah and the prophetess Huldah, the former fixing his time of labor in the thoroughfares and market places, the latter exercising her honorable vocation in the college in Jerusalem.

Zephaniah was a person of great character. He was a member of the royal family and a poet. He was a great-great grandson of king Hezekiah and a distant cousin of the present king Josiah and a relative also of the prophet Isaiah.

Zephaniah's home no doubt was Jerusalem; from chapter three we read of his acquaintance with certain conditions existing in the city at that time (3:lff).

The Date Written

Various dates have been assigned the book of Zephaniah. It is recorded (ch. 1) that the Word of the Lord came to Zephaniah “in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah.” He flourished during the earlier portion of Josiah’s reign. In the second chapter (vv. 13-15), he foretells the destruction of Nineveh, and the fall of that ancient city happened about the eighteenth year of Josiah. In his prophecies of doom, he also denounced various forms of idolatry and especially the remnant of Baal.

The reformation of Josiah began in the twelfth and was completed in the eighteenth year of his reign. Josiah was so thorough in his destruction of the idolatrous rites and hierarchy that defiled his kingdom that he burned down the groves, dismissed the priesthood, threw down altars, and made dust of the images of Baalim. The convictions of Josiah were strong, but such was not the case with Judah.

Zephaniah prophesied prior to this religious revolution, while some remains of Baal worship remained in the land between the twelfth and eighteenth years of Josiah, the royal reformer. Considering the background and time of Zephaniah, he lived and prophesied between the years 642 and 611 B.C. His prophecy concerning the destruction of the Assyrian empire must have been delivered before the year 612 B.C., the year Nineveh fell.

The prophecies of Zephaniah were contemporary with a portion of those of Jeremiah, for the Word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah. Chronologically, Zephaniah was contemporary with Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Nahum, and Huldah, the prophetess.

Other dates are given by other writers: Thiele, 640-609 B.C.; Eiselen, 625 B.C.; Robinson, 625 B.C.; Hailey, 630-585 B.C.

Why Did Zephaniah Prophesy?

Hailey, in his excellent book on the minor prophets, says:

Scholars are divided over the occasion that gave rise to his prophesying. Some think it was provoked by the invasion of the Scythians, who poured south from the northern steppes about this time. These ruthless hordes invaded the Assyrian empire and followed the Mediterranean coast south to the border of Egypt where they were turned back. Others think that his prophesying was prompted by the rise of the Chaldean power, which Zephaniah saw as the ultimate threat of a general world judgment. The weight of evidence lends greater credence to this latter view (Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, p. 223).

The Contents Of The Book

Following is a brief analysis of the main content of the book.

(1) Zephaniah bears the burden of declaring judgment and doom upon Jerusalem and Judah. In fact, it is so vivid, it is quoted for your reading:

The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry 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 fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood shall be poured out as dust and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured

by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of them that dwell in that land. (Zeph. 1:14-18).

What a sobering picture of the judgment of God on a people and nation.

(2) Chapter two begins with a plea for the people to repent. The nation is called upon to bend in submission to God before judgment falls. Judah was unashamed of its sin. They defied the wrath of God. Their cup of iniquity was about full; time was running out (2:1-4)! Judgment is also declared against Judah's neighbors and foes—against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Egypt (here called "Ethiopians" because, at the time, the Ethiopians ruled the Egyptians), and, finally, against the greatest of them all, Assyria (2:4-15).

(3) In chapter three he returned to the indictment and impending judgment against his own people, especially corrupt rulers. The background to this corruption was the result of poor leadership from Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:1-17) and his son, Ammon (33:21-24). Following Ammon's death, Josiah tried to bring about reform (when the Law was found in the temple ruins) but had little results (chps. 34-35). The rulers indicted by Zephaniah included princes, judges, prophets and priests (Zeph. 3:1-7). Too often, Judah had called upon the name of heathen gods and used the language of idolatry (Isa. 6:5; Hos. 2:16-17).

When people rebel against God and practice all forms of wickedness, the land itself begins to "vomit" them out as the body heaves under the load of internal poisons. Judah and Jerusalem were sick, and the antidote would no doubt be invasion from the Scythians and Babylonians.

A Ray Of Hope

Zephaniah closes his book with a Messianic prophecy (Zeph. 3:14-20). He saw a remnant return from the

Babylonian captivity, but he saw also beyond that to the Gospel and the new covenant. Anyone who sees in this some future for Israel apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ misunderstands the prophecy (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30; Gen. 49:10; John 11:51-52; Eph. 1:10-12, 22-23; 3:10-11, 21). It is the new covenant that extends hope to all men who will speak “a pure language and call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one consent,” a people who will walk by faith and live righteous lives (Rev. 2:10).

CHAPTER 27

Commentary On The Book Of Zephaniah

Darrell Conley

Introduction

I*T IS WITH PLEASURE* that I acknowledge my thanks to brethren Garland Elkins and Thomas Warren and to the elders of the Southaven church of Christ for this invitation to be a participant in the Second Annual **POWER** Lectureship. It is always a joy to be associated with such soldiers of the cross who have done so much and sacrificed so much for the cause of Christ.

There is a great need for helps and commentaries in the study of the minor prophets. It is without doubt the most neglected portion of Scripture.

Verse One

This verse serves as a brief preface to the book of Zephaniah. The prophet identifies himself as a great-great grandson of good king Hezekiah of Judah and as a contemporary and distant relative of good king Josiah, the current king of Judah. There is little doubt that the Hezekiah mentioned is, in fact, the famous king of Judah. There was no need to append “king of Judah” to his name, since he was known to all. If he did not mean to indicate the late king of Judah, it would have been necessary to state such to avoid the obvious misunderstanding.

Josiah, great grandson of Hezekiah, assumed the throne at the age of eight and reigned for thirty-one years (640-609 B.C.). This would have made Zephaniah a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah.

He boldly asserts that his message is not his own but the Word of Jehovah: "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). All of Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The words of the Bible are, therefore, the words of God Himself (1 Cor. 2:13) and should be revered as though the Almighty spoke them audibly in our presence.

Judgment Pronounced (1:2-18)

Jehovah pronounces a sweeping judgment upon the land. "Land" is probably the better translation of the word **"adamah"** and is so translated in the KJV. The ASV gives it as "earth," the implication being that the entire earth is the subject of the forthcoming judgment, instead of primarily the land of Canaan. The Hebrew word is used in both ways in Scripture, many times to designate the promised land, the land of Canaan. The context must determine the usage.

If we take it to mean the whole earth, then we must understand the Lord to be saying that He will bring a judgment upon the earth to rival that of the Flood. Even allowing for hyperbole, as we must, we would have to conclude that most men and beasts in the entire earth would be destroyed. We must reject such a reading. No such judgment came.

If we take it to mean the land that had been given to the children of Israel, then the judgment that God did bring against Judah is properly and dramatically described. In fact, Judah and Jerusalem are immediately identified as the subjects of the wrath and judgment of God.

All in the land will be affected: man, beast, bird, and fish. He would destroy the idols that had served as stumbling blocks and the wicked who made them and worshiped them. Man would be removed from the face of the land. Moses had promised that, if the children of Israel would be true to God, “he will bless thee in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 28:8). But, if they were unfaithful to God, “ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it” (28:63). Zephaniah is prophesying the fulfillment of the words of Moses.

In verse four, God declares that His judgment is focused upon Judah and Jerusalem. The outstretched hand or arm of Jehovah to smash is an often-used figure to denote God’s judgment. He would cut off the remnant of the worshipers of Baal. This would seem to date the prophecy of Zephaniah after Josiah had begun his restoration of the worship of God and had already begun to deal with the worship of Baal. Now judgment would fall upon the remnant. “From this place” is the place where God said He would put His name forever (2 Kings 21:7).

The word “Baal” meant “possessor” or “master” and was originally applied to the idol god of a particular place. There were many Baals. But it came to refer to the Canaanite god of fertility. The Chemarim were the priests appointed by the kings of Judah to offer worship in the high places in Judea (23:5).

Included in verse five are those who worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. They did so by burning incense on their flat roofs.

He then specifies three groups upon which judgment is to fall. The first are those who swear to Jehovah and swear to Malcham (their king, a reference to Baal). These are those of divided loyalty. They are hypocrites who will name Jehovah as their God in one circumstance and Malcham as their god in another. They are those who try

to serve two masters. Second are those who have turned back from following Jehovah. They are the apostates. Their situation and destiny is described in some detail in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31. The third group are those who had not sought Jehovah nor inquired after Him. These are the indifferent and willfully ignorant. Those who do not know God will suffer eternal destruction along with those who obey not the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The imminent judgment of God is now depicted under the figure of a sacrificial offering. It is introduced by the phrase from temple worship that all were to keep silence in the presence of Jehovah. The “day of Jehovah” is a phrase that always describes the judgment of God. It may sometimes be used of the final judgment, but most often it is used to denote God’s temporal judgments upon nations. Here it is used to declare that the long-prophesied destruction of Judah and its carrying away into Babylon was close at hand.

Judah is the sacrifice that has been prepared, and the people of Babylon are His guests and His instruments.

No wicked man will be spared. The descendants of the corrupt royal house of Judah (with the exception of faithful Josiah—2 Kings 22:20—but including his sons) would be punished. Those that wore costly foreign clothes (and no doubt corrupted Judah with foreign manners) would be punished, however wealthy.

The superstitious believed that the threshold of a house was protected by the household gods. Therefore, those bent on robbery or mischief would leap over the threshold in an attempt to escape the notice of the household deities. Such violence and deceit would be punished.

None of the locations mentioned in verse ten is known with certainty. The fish gate may have been located in the north wall leading into the part of the city described as

the second quarter. This would have been the direction from which the invaders would come. The hills may refer to the several hills on which Jerusalem was built.

From the context, Maktesh may refer to an area of commerce. Several commentators believe the Canaanites to refer to Jews who had become like the Canaanites in their business dealings and lust for wealth.

Some might think in their complacency that they would somehow escape the punishment of God. But God would search the city with lamps. God's judgment reveals all that is hidden or secret. The indifference of some is described as wine in which the sediment has been allowed to settle and the wine ruined. Such do not believe that God would punish Judah in general or themselves in particular. God will do neither good nor evil, they believe. All things will continue in their natural course of events.

But their wealth will be spoiled. The fruit of their labors will be enjoyed by another. This echoes exactly the warnings of Moses in his last address to Israel.

Zephaniah repeats his warning of the imminence of the day of God's judgment. The day is near when the terrible things thundered by the voice of God will become a reality. The mighty man will cry, as helpless as a baby in the face of God's wrath.

Verse fifteen describes vividly the horror of that day. Verse sixteen identifies the judgment as including an attack upon the smugly fortified Jerusalem.

Verse seventeen describes the utter confusion of that day and declares that human blood will be spilled and human flesh discarded as if it were without value.

Their wealth cannot save them. God's jealousy will devour and make an end of them. God is jealous, not in the sinful manner of human jealousy, but in demanding that He alone be worshiped and served as God. He

demands the same of all men today and, though the form of the idolatry may change, it is still true that “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

A Call To Repentance (2:1-3:8)

The purpose of the foregoing description of the horrors associated with God’s judgment has not been without purpose. The purpose has been to induce the people of Judah to repent. They are urged to pull themselves together before it is too late for them personally. It is already too late for Judah as a nation. The judgment will come. It had been determined by God as early as the reign of the wicked Manasseh. But the penitent individual could still save himself from the wrath to come. Ezekiel is clear about this in speaking of the same judgment:

Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had taken by robbery, walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he had committed shall be remembered against him; he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live (Ezek. 33:14-16).

God has always given men time to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). God even heard the penitent prayer of the monstrously wicked Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:10-13). The pivotal question is not whether we will be allowed to repent but whether we will repent. But the time for repentance is not unlimited. Zephaniah urges them not to allow this precious time to pass away as chaff. How many have wasted their priceless opportunity to repent?

Verse three urges the meek, those who are willing to humble themselves before God, to beg His forgiveness and be directed by His will to seek Jehovah. They seek Jehovah

by keeping His ordinances (1 John 2:3), by seeking righteousness (Matt. 5:6), and by seeking meekness (5:5).

There is no other way to hide from the wrath of God, for it will be visited on all of Judah's neighbors. In verses four through eight, doom is pronounced on that nation to the west: Philistia.

The Philistines were one of the most ancient and persistent of the enemies of Israel and Judah. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron are all locations in Philistia. Gaza was to be forsaken. We are reminded of the instructions given to Philip in Acts 8:26, where Gaza is spoken of as desert, a place uninhabited, forsaken. Ashkelon was to be desolated, Ashdod driven out, and Ekron rooted up. Ashkelon was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C.

The inhabitants of the seacoast and the Cherethites are expressions denoting the Philistines. Canaan is called the land of the Philistines. At one time they virtually inhabited the entire land. The Word of God was against them, and it was and is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12).

Although there is no escape from God's judgment in fleeing to Philistia, there will come a time when it will be indwelt by the remnant of God's people who, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, will be returned to Canaan. In the midst of this book detailing the terrible wrath of God is the promise that some will return to the land.

The nations to the east of Judah, Moab and Ammon, would not escape. The people of the two nations were descended from the two sons born from Lot's incestuous union with his daughters (Gen. 19:36-38). They were guilty of reproaching and reviling God's people. This was no recent development. Balaam had been recruited by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel as Israel approached the land of Canaan (Num. 22-24). Amos describes and condemns some

of the atrocities of Ammon and Moab (Amos 1:13-2:3). They were also guilty of trying to enlarge their boundaries at the expense of the people of God.

Solemnly, God declares that, as sure as He is the living God, Moab will be destroyed as thoroughly as Sodom and Ammon as completely as Gomorrah. It is ironic that these two nations, born out of the aftermath of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, now nearly fifteen hundred years later share the end of those infamous cities. Their landscape would consist of nettles and salt pits. Their prospect was only desolation. The remnant of God's people would inherit what was left of the ancient nations of Moab and Ammon.

This terrible fall was the result of their pride:

We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud; even of his arrogancy, and his pride, and his wrath; his boastings are nought (Isa. 16:6).

The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith Jehovah. Make ye him drunken; for he magnified himself against Jehovah: and Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he shall also be in derision (Jer. 48:25-26).

The root of the sin of Moab and Ammon was idolatry. They had known God, but they embraced idolatry. For this reason the terror of the Lord came upon them. Here, in verse eleven, we are given a glimpse of the Gospel Age. The idols of the time of Zephaniah are gone. They starved to death from neglect. In every nation men acknowledge the God of Abraham as the true and living God.

Now He turns to the south, to the nation of Ethiopia. It, too, will not escape His judgment. It is likely that his reference to Ethiopia includes Egypt. Egypt had been ruled for more than fifty years by Ethiopians:

And a sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundation shall be broken down, Ethiopia, and Put, and Lud, and all the mingled people, and Cub, and the children of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword (Ezek. 30:4-5).

And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. And I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon; and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt (30:24-25).

Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 586 B.C.

And, finally, he turns to the north, to the nation of Assyria and its capital, Nineveh. Assyria had long been the most bitter enemy of Israel and Judah. One hundred years before, Assyria had invaded Israel, conquered its capital, Samaria, and carried away its people. Israel, the northern kingdom, had ceased to exist. At the time that Zephaniah wrote this prophecy, Assyria was at the height of its power. It was the world kingdom of its time. Yet, remarkably, Zephaniah prophesies, correctly, its utter destruction. There were no trends that could have resulted in such a prediction. If anything, the trends indicated the continued prosperity of Assyria for hundreds of years. Instead, by Divine inspiration, he foretells its desolation. The great city of Nineveh would be a wilderness. It would be inhabited by wild beasts. The pelican and the porcupine would lodge in the capitals, the carved crowns of its fallen pillars. This would be the end of the arrogant and powerful city that was filled with pride, believing itself to be uniquely

immune to the fate that might befall other cities. It would soon be, instead of an occasion for pride, an occasion for hissing and shaking the head.

Now, in chapter three, the attention returns to Jerusalem. It is not simply a wicked city, one that has never known or worshiped God. This is the place where God had put His name. It is a rebellious city. It possessed God's Law and rejected it. It should have been pure as the bride of God. But it was polluted. Instead of justice, it had become a city of oppression.

She had heard the voice of God but did not obey. Like the fools described in Proverbs, she would not be corrected. She trusted in wealth and power, not in her God. She did not draw near to God, either in times of prosperity, or in time of trouble.

Her nobility, who should have protected the weak, were roaring lions and thus sought whom they might devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Judges should be fair and impartial. They should seek justice for all who stand before them. But her judges were like hungry wolves who gulped down their prey at once and left nothing over.

Those who claimed the name of prophet were light and treacherous persons. There is no more solemn office than that of serving as prophet of God. It was never an office that produced ease and popularity for the faithful prophet. It was a thankless task. It required the public condemnation of sin in the lowly and in the mighty. It required calling an often-heedless people back to their God. It often cost the prophet his life (Matt. 23:37). But there were many false prophets as there are false preachers today. They were always ready to speak smooth things and prophesy lies (Isa. 30:10).

Those who held the exalted position of priest were no better. They had profaned the sanctuary and done violence to the Law of God. There are many today who are

ready to offer in worship unto God that which is unauthorized and therefore unholy and profane. They believe they can honor God without honoring His Law.

But Jehovah remains a righteous and holy God. He will not do iniquity, nor will He countenance sin. He is a just God who demands penalty for sin. The only way that the just God could provide for our forgiveness was by providing His own Son as payment for our sin: "that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The people of God may have become unjust, they may be without shame, they may have forgotten that God is just, but His justice does not fail, and they would taste the justice of God.

Time and again God had demonstrated that His justice does not fail. He had caused entire nations to disappear. Their fortified points He had ruined. Their streets were filled with rubble and empty of people. No one lives in these vanished cities.

Yet all this was unnecessary. God had simply demanded that He be feared and served, that His people be willing as sinful, foolish, and frail creatures to receive instruction and correction. In return, none of the terrible things that God had spoken would come to pass. But, as He said in verse five, they were without shame. They refused to follow the path of safety; they eagerly arose early in the morning to embrace corruption.

Having rejected the pleas to repent, there is nothing to do but wait for the judgment of God:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries (Heb. 10:26-27).

This is a fearful wait for the wicked, but a wait of hope for the righteous remnant. Many commentators seem

to feel that God's prey is not the wicked as they are punished and destroyed. This was never what God desired. God's desire, His aim, His prey, was a people devoted to Him. Such a faithful remnant would be His after He had brought judgment upon the nations mentioned above.

Hope And Salvation (3:9-20)

The concluding section of Zephaniah without doubt refers to the return from Babylonian captivity to the land of Canaan. But without doubt it also has reference to the Gospel Age. We have here one of the many instances in the Old Testament where events are prophesied that took place before the coming of Christ but serve as types of the Christian Age. Thus Adam was a type of Christ. The tabernacle was a type of the church. The sacrifices were a type of the death of Christ. And the salvation of the faithful remnant from Babylon is a type of the church, the called-out of God.

The people would worship God with pure lips and a sincere heart. They would all call upon Jehovah. Idolatry would be banished.

Verse ten either means that the faithful of God would be brought to Him from the far corners of the earth or (according to the marginal reading in the ASV) that the Gentiles, now part of God's covenant, would help to turn the Jews to Him.

Their sins will be forgiven and their shame taken away. In the new order there will be no place for the proud and haughty. Although afflicted and poor, they will be true to Jehovah. In the new Israel (see Gal. 6:16; Rom. 2:28-29), they will lead lives of purity and honesty. In their devotion to Jehovah, they will dwell in safety.

What a contrast between the Jerusalem of Zephaniah's day and of that glorious day yet to come! Instead of weeping and suffering and fear and death, there

will be joy and singing and safety. God will dwell in the midst of them: “And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is being interpreted, God with us” (Matt. 1:23). God will rejoice over them, will rest in His love of them, and will sing with joy over them.

In verse eighteen He renews His promise to reclaim the remnant who had remained faithful to Him. He will bring judgment upon those who had afflicted them; He will gather them and take away their shame.

When the Lord brings back their captivity (whether from Babylon or from sin), He will make a name for them, and they will be praised among all the peoples of the earth.

CHAPTER 28

Great Lessons From The Book Of Zephaniah

Andrew Connally

Introduction

P*REACHING FROM THE PROPHETS* is among the greatest preaching found in the Bible. It is as fresh as tomorrow's headlines and as relevant as yesterday's history.

God has spoken through His prophets and made His will known through their preaching. The prophets have thundered from Mt. Sinai to the isle of Patmos. They have dreamed in the wilderness and seen visions on the Mount of Transfiguration. They have preached the depths of God's mind and declared the majesty of His glory. They have climbed the mountain and walked in the valley of the shadow. They were men—men of God who shaped and framed the destiny of the world. These men still live; they live awaiting the glorious resurrection, but they live in their writings—writings that teach us, reprove us, rebuke us, and persuade us of better things. Thank God for the prophets and thank God for the wonderful words left behind.

Now let us study the great preaching of Zephaniah.

The Prophet And His Times

His Pedigree

This is the only instance in the Bible where the ancestors of a prophet are traced back four generations.

This no doubt was done to show his relationship to the great king Hezekiah of Judah. There is no doubt this makes Zephaniah of royal blood and further shows the continuing influence of a godly life.

His Authority

This authority did not derive from his royal lineage, neither from royal blood, but rather from the inspiration of Almighty God. Notice, “The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah” (Zeph. 1:1). Thus the Spirit of God filled this man, and his words are possessed of Divine authority. But like all great men of God, he spoke as God directed.

His Times

He prophesied “in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.” Unfortunately, Hezekiah’s reign did not continue, and his son and grandson corrupted the people and allowed idolatry to proliferate, so the nation was in shambles, both politically and spiritually, when Josiah came to reign. Zephaniah, like Jeremiah, of whom he was a contemporary, had his work cut out for him!

His Message

It was one of judgment and doom with strong Messianic overtones. The anger of the Lord has been aroused, and He will “cut off,” “punish,” “remove,” and “I will plunder their wealth,” “woe to the inhabitants of the land.”

The Corrupted Priesthood And Their Influence

An Exalted Office

The priesthood was of Divine appointment for the most sacred work in the kingdom of God. They ministered

in the “holy place” and “the most holy place.” The lesson is clear: if you claim to minister to things of God, you must not allow yourself to be corrupted. Jesus warned, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8); again, “Keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22); and again, “But like he who called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of living, for it is written, you shall be holy as I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). And “everyone that hath his hope set on him purifieth himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Their Corruption

Like so many, the priests allowed themselves to be corrupted by joining the idolatrous at the altars of Baal:

And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places round about Jerusalem, them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven (2 Kings 23:5).

Their Ungodly Influence

Surely “like priests, like people,” prevailed, and the people loved to have it so!

And I will cut off...them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship, that swear to Jehovah and swear by Malcham, and them that are turned back from following Jehovah; and those that have not sought Jehovah, nor inquired after him (Zeph. 1:4-6).

This results in angering Jehovah. He will only bear with evil men so long. His loving kindness must be merged with justice and retribution. Their sin of apostasy was very real.

The Sin Of Apostasy: “And Them That Are Turned Back From The Lord”

A False Sense Of Success

Men so often are lulled into a false sense of success and they allow their temporal wealth to blind their eyes. Notice: “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art become sleek; and lightly esteem the Rock of his salvation” (Deut. 32:15).

Physical Adversity Often Arises

“The cares of the world” often choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful. The very thing to bring men to God often drives them from Him!

The Love Of The World

Demas, like Israel, “loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10), and, like Demas, Israel apostasized!

The Sin of Indifference: “The Lord Will Not Do Good Or Evil”

A Failure To Recognize God

“And those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of him” (Zeph. 1:6). The idolatrous people divided their allegiance between God and Baal. Thus do worldly Christians; notice James 4:4: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.”

A Failure To Think God Cares

“He will do neither good nor evil” (Zeph. 1:12). Man thinks that God is as neglectful as man is! For shame!

This is so typical of people who leave God out of their thinking. God cares, and we had better not neglect, for “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Heb. 2:3).

“They settled on their lees” (Zeph. 1:12). O my, how often we allow ourselves to be satisfied when we fall far too short to be pleasing to God. The dregs often are the foundation of our lives, and lives built upon dregs are as spoiled as the dregs upon which they rest! A closing of the eyes and ears and folding of the hands is all it takes!

The Day Of The Lord Is At Hand

“Prepare To Meet Thy God”: The Day Of The Lord

From time immemorial God has made man aware that Judgment is coming! The day is “at hand” (Zeph. 1:7), “near” (1:14), a terrible day of darkness, terror (1:15-16). It is due to their sin (1:17), accompanied by convulsions of nature (1:15). It is universal and falls upon all. None shall escape, neither man nor beast. Notice what George Adam Smith says:

No hotter book lies in the Old Testament: neither dew or grass nor tree nor any blossom lives in it, but is everywhere fire, smoke, darkness, drifting, chaff, ruins, nettles, salt pits, and owls and ravens looking from the window of desolate places.

Universal Judgment

God is no respecter of persons. “The mighty man crieth bitterly there,” and the king’s sons and the princes “He has consecrated His guests” (1:7). Neither silver or gold can deliver, for God “will search Jerusalem with lamps” (1:12). “Men will walk like the blind,” and “their blood will be poured out like dust” (1:17). For “in the fire of his

jealousy he will make a complete end”—indeed a terrifying one of all the inhabitants of the earth” (1:18).

Our Responsibility

“Be silent in the presence of the Lord God” (1:7). God admonishes, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psm. 46:10). In the presence of God, man needs to recognize his own worthlessness! This implies a recognition that God is God, and He demands all to see His wrath—evil must be punished. There is an abhorrence and destruction by God that man should learn to appreciate. There is a luxury, a negligence, a disobedience, a selfish indulgence, a racism, an oppression that brutalizes and degrades man to the point that God’s anger must respond—His wrath must be kindled, the fire must rage to purge the land, to purify and perfect the souls of men and to destroy the works of the wicked.

Sins Must Be Punished

Judah, Jerusalem, God’s chosen had succumbed to idolatry, negligence, and following after the nations. This is always catastrophic to God’s people in every generation. It was then, it is now. Woe to those who procrastinate!

The nations shall pay as well. The Philistines were idolatrous, warlike, and immoral.

The Moabites and the Ammonites were no better. They were arrogant and proud, reproaching God’s people (Zeph. 2:8). Their arrogance and pride were their death knell (2:10).

When Zephaniah looked north, south, east and west and proclaimed God’s judgment upon all the nations, this clearly shows God is involved with all the peoples of the earth and always has been. They were given laws. To disobey them was to incur the wrath of Almighty God. While God worked out His special purpose for Israel, He

had plans for all peoples always. He still does, even though we recognize His special purpose in the church, His chosen people. Nevertheless all are amenable to the Law of Christ and therefore answerable to the God of the universe.

None Escaped

Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria—all must be called to account and they must pay; utter ruin is their destiny. Arrogant national pride, based on anything except moral excellence, is a mockery; and how much moral excellence do we find in any nation that has stood very long! Notice:

The pride of the heart hath deceived thee, 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? 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 (Obad. 3-4).

So whether it is the nations or Israel, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:13), it is a tragedy to leave God out of our thinking.

Notice:

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! Every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand (Zeph. 2:15).

The Messianic Import: “The King Of Israel, Even Judah, Is In The Midst Of Thee: Thou Shall Not Fear Evil Anymore”

It was said of Jesus, “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49). This is as relevant a passage as is found in all of God’s Word to show Jesus is

God and God is dwelling in His people; therefore, we should not fear. God gives, God dwells, and we are secure!

Notice:

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. 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. 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. 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 (Zeph. 3:14-20).

And,

(3:18) Jehovah will demonstrate His love for the pious of Israel by gathering them together to Himself. But before this can be done, Judah must be scattered among the nations in the judgment at hand. Through this refining experience, those would be restored who sorrow for the assembly, who yearn for the presence of Jehovah, and to whom this scattering from the presence of the Lord was considered a great reproach.

(3:19) God would deal with those who would afflict His people; they would not escape the fire of His wrath. The “lame” and the “driven away” indicate the state of the people in a hapless,

helpless, and homeless condition. As He had promised to make of these a “strong nation” (Mic. 4:6-7), so now He will make of them “a praise” instead of the shame which they had been and which had been brought on them.

(3:20) With some slight change in wording, Jehovah repeats the promise already made. This gives emphasis to the determination to accomplish His purpose. Note the use of the personal pronoun “I” in verses 18-20: “I will gather,” “I will deal,” “I will save,” “I will make,” “will I bring you in,” “will I gather you,” “I will make,” “when I bring back your captivity before your eyes.” While they are still a people, He would so fulfill His promise that all would see it. The work of redemption will be the work of the Lord. The people had refused to give heed to Him when He had called; therefore, He had scattered them abroad. Now it would be He who would bring them back. In this assurance let them hope and rejoice! (Homer Hailey: **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, pp. 246-247).

CHAPTER 29

Introduction To The Book Of Haggai

Goebel Music

Commendation

I WAS TRULY HONORED and blessed to have had the glorious opportunity, the privilege, of being on the first **POWER** Lectureship! I am as sorrowful about missing this, the second lectureship, as I was thrilled about the genesis of such a lectureship. However, being in full-time evangelistic work, along with my other variegated activities that demanded advanced years in scheduling, it has been impossible for me to change my August schedule and be there in person this August 26-30, 1990. This is fully understandable, as the **POWER** Lectures just commenced last year.

There is, however, the challenge, the thrill, the honor, and, of course, the glorious delight of doing the research for one of the “minor prophets.” I am humbled and most thankful for having “this part” in this second series of lectures. I trust this section in the lectureship book will, along with all of the others, bring the glory that rightfully belongs to the work of our Master.

I want to once again state and declare that these lectureship books on the Bible, both on the Old and New Testaments, will be one of the richest things we can leave as a righteous inheritance to our children and our

children's children—that is, unless, of course, the Lord comes first. This year, in November (at the Denton lectures), the Lord willing, we will have the Ninth ADL. This will complete the entire New Testament, as far as our lectureship books are concerned. It is, to me, as well as to many others, a “milestone” in some of the richest and most valuable materials available on the books of the New Testament. May all of the honor and praise go directly where it belongs—to His Majesty! I would to God that every parent, yea, every member of the church, saw the value of purchasing the same and giving them as “gifts” to children, friends, young preachers, missionaries, mission points of endeavor, as memorials, books in our church libraries and those of our various schools of preaching, etc.!

Introduction

In the various studies thus far, one's mind, heart, and soul has been thoroughly stirred by these “minor” prophets. Thus far, we have walked and lived with the lives and messages of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Out of the sixty-seven chapters that we find in these “minor” prophets, we have already had the thrill of having forty-seven of them viewed before us.

We now come to Haggai, the tenth of these “minor” prophets as per our English Bible. Just because Haggai is the second shortest of these twelve (Obadiah only consists of one chapter of twenty-one verses), having only two chapters and thirty-eight verses, does not lessen the magnitude of the material of this book. The prophetic discourses of this man of God are referred to in both the Old and New Testaments (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Heb. 12:26).

Here is a man whose “time has come.” Of the man himself we know very little—that is, the place and year of his birth, his descent, various incidents of his life, etc., are

unknown. Perhaps he was a little older than Zechariah, who was his contemporary (cf. Hag. 2:3; Zech. 2:4). About the only thing for sure that we know of him is his preaching. We do know that his background was about the same as Nehemiah and Ezra. We can also, as we read the book of Ezra, know of his background and place his date at 520 B.C., as his life is directly connected with “temple events,” which we now observe.

Some Major Temple Events

Haggai, whose name means “festive,” has been termed by some as the “prophet of the temple.” This is so stated as he was the first of the three post-exilic prophets and his main concern was that the temple be rebuilt. Haggai was the “religious sparkplug” behind the Jewish people in this effort.

To correctly comprehend the times and the conditions under which Haggai’s discourses and labors are given, let us note, from both Ezra and Haggai, some of these major temple events.

1. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had invaded Jerusalem in 606 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 24:13). His last invasion caused the temple to be burned down (25:9), and the date is perhaps 586 B.C.

2. The Jews had become a captive people, and their captivity lasted seventy years (cf. Jer. 25:11).

3. Ezra 1:1-4 reveals the written proclamation of Cyrus, the king of Persia, as per “the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished.” These enslaved Jews could now return to Palestine and build the house of the Lord. This edict of Cyrus is dated at 536 B.C. Many of the Jews returned (cf. Ezra 2:1-64, esp. v. 64).

4. The return from Babylon under Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:1-10) was made, and “temple work” was begun, but not without opposition. The foundations of the temple were

laid, but it was not long until all work ceased. It was the decree of Artaxerxes (4:21) about 535 B.C. that caused this.

5. The work of rebuilding a house for the worship of Jehovah ceased for a period of some fifteen to sixteen years. This included over a year under the reign of Darius (cf. Hag. 1:1).

6. In the second year of Darius (cf. Hag. 1:1), about 520 B.C., the building resumed.

7. Haggai was the first of the three post-exilic prophets and began his work in 520 B.C., which was sixteen years after the decree of Cyrus. Thus, we have no difficulty in placing, and very accurately so, Haggai's prophetic ministry.

8. According to Zechariah (cf. Zech. 1:1) chapter one, as well as Ezra 5:1, we see Zechariah joining Haggai in his prophetic work two months later.

9. It is stated in Ezra 6:14-15 that the house of God was as "the commandment of God" and that it was "finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."

10. The temple was completed about 515 or 516 B.C.

11. The completion of the temple is stated as being "in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king" (Ezra 6:15). It had begun "in the...sixth month of the second year of Darius the king" (cf. Hag. 1:15). Darius reigned before Haggai commenced his work and continued to reign through the temple's being completed.

12. It is to be noted that the temple was finished four years, six months, and two days after Haggai's first discourse as noted by Haggai 1:1 and Ezra 6:15.

Haggai's Effective Ministry

Earlier I stated that "Haggai was a man 'whose time had come.'" Recall, just for a moment, some of the thoughts found in the temple events. Here you will observe the

Babylonian exile and finally see the exile run its course. Cyrus gives an edict to release the captives. They now have a liberty they had not known for decades. Many return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Haggai is with them), and the work of rebuilding the temple begins. Back now in their own country, we see the Jews build an altar, offer burnt offerings, keep the feast of tabernacles and even lay the foundations of the temple. However, their work is troubled, and then it is finally stopped by a decree from Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:21). For the next fifteen to sixteen years, the Jews seemingly make no attempt to rebuild the house of their God.

Haggai comes on the scene in 520 B.C. The first of three postexilics, he both illuminates and inflames, with all the urgency of his being, the rebuilding of the temple. Two months after he commences his great work, he is joined by Zechariah, another post-exilic prophet. We see these two men laboring together on behalf of the reconstruction of the great temple of God, His house of worship.

Haggai's prophetic discourses emphasize again God's authority as the element needed for the support of the temple work. In fact, he makes claim that this is a righteous service on which their prosperity will depend. Their own houses were in good shape, but the house of God was described as "lieth waste." His rebuke was stern, and he pressed the point of their crops in the fields and their own dispositions being so bad as in direct connection to their neglect of God's house and their duties toward their Lord. Indeed, these Jews were weary, despondent, unhappy, peaceless, restless, yea, and selfish. Their time in exile away from "the house of God and its worship" seemingly had an effect on them.

This prophet of God may have lacked the poetical eloquence of some, as his style seems to bear out, but when it came "to the work," he was "a helping hand":

Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the Son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem; in the name of the God of Israel prophesied they unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them (Ezra 5:1-2; cf. 6:14).

I often wonder if perhaps this is why that, in twenty-three days after his first address, work on the temple was commenced (cf. Hag. 1:1, 15), and then in four years, six months, and two days (after that first address), it was completed (Hag. 1:1; Ezra 6:15).

Jehovah's Message By Haggai The Messenger

The prophecies of Haggai are comprised of a book of two chapters consisting of thirty-eight verses. In these thirty-eight verses we find four discourses. These discourses are naturally divided and there is no question relative to their date, as they are precisely listed. We now observe each of these as per the order in which they are given.

1. Prophecy Number One: This occurred on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of Darius. This first utterance covers chapter one (vv. 1-15).

2. Prophecy Number Two: On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the prophet makes his second address to these people. It covers chapter 2:1-9.

3. Prophecy Number Three: Instead of the next month, as in the second prophecy from the first, we now go from the seventh to the ninth month, the twenty-fourth day. This is revealed in 2:10-19.

4. Prophecy Number Four: We now have two prophecies that are given in the same month, in fact, on the same day of that month, being the ninth month. This is seen in 2:20-23.

Now let me give the basic thought of these four prophetic utterances. I will also give these by giving “our month” instead of the ones listed as the sixth, seventh and ninth months. I do this to press home the urgency of the messages.

1. **In September**, Haggai exhorts Zerubbabel and Joshua in the work of rebuilding the temple. He also very sternly reproves the people for building their own ceiled houses and for their saying that it just was not the time to build Jehovah’s house. In addition, he asked that they consider the barrenness of the land and their own dissatisfaction with life as it directly relates to their own selfishness and how they have put their own affairs first.

2. **In October**, Haggai pleads with those who had seen the glory of the former temple to recall such glory. The builders are encouraged in their work. Finally, we learn that the comparison of the glory of the latter will be greater than that of the former temple. Then he makes this statement: “And in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts.”

3. **In December**, Haggai gets their attention relative to the principle of cleanliness by having them ask the priests about it. The point is driven home by stating one is not made holy by touching holy things. Then, just the opposite is made known, as they make unclean the things that are clean by reason of their uncleanness. The promise is made of blessing instead of blasting if they will be faithful in their work on the reconstruction of the temple.

4. **In December**, yea, twice now in this month, Haggai speaks. He now speaks of Zerubbabel and how that he would be “as a signet.” He states this in reference to the catastrophic happenings of thrones of kingdoms being overthrown. However, there is consolation for the governor of Judah as “Jehovah’s chosen one.” How true it is of the enemies of God always being punished, but the faithful’s being blessed.

Haggai's Words Are Powerful And Permanent

In view of Romans 15:4, it seems only natural to observe a few jewels in this diamond-studded book of thirty-eight verses. Some of these I have studied and preached on for years, and I find them to be among some of the finest thoughts one could have.

1. Preaching should always be backed up, or set forth, with a “thus saith (speaketh) Jehovah” (cf. Hag. 1:2, 5, 7, etc.).

2. Questions have always been a technique of real value, as seen not only here, but also in the life of the Master of men (cf. 1:4; 2:3, 11-13, 19).

3. Procrastination has forever been a downfall to man. Note that this is found in both chapters.

4. Reproving and rebuking in reference to man's duty to God is always in order, especially as seen in chapter one.

5. The spiritual is to always take priority over the physical, as the center of life is inward, spiritual, as seen in chapter two.

6. Self-examination is always in order. I am amazed at his use of the word “consider” (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18), as it truly penetrates into one's inner self.

7. What a lesson there is in the words “Build the house,” as seen in 1:8.

8. One item God has always wanted in His people is seen in the admonition to “Be strong” (cf. 2:4). To be strong, one must “work” (2:4) and also one must “fear not” (2:5).

9. One must be made to see the danger of materialism, or we might say affluence, as seen in 1:4.

10. God's promises are always conditional, but God always keeps His Word (cf. 1:8, 13; 2:6-9, 14, 19, etc.).

Conclusion

God has always had a “perfect” time for all things. Everything was ready when John the Immerser came (cf.

John 1:6ff), and it was in “the fulness of the time” when God sent forth His Son (cf. Gal. 4:4). It seems that the “sudden” appearance of Haggai in 520 B.C. was “just such a time.” He came, he spoke, he challenged, he encouraged, he prophesied, he helped, and he inflamed the people to do God’s bidding. Haggai was God’s man, with God’s plan, and nothing stopped the temple from being rebuilt. Yea, it was completed in a matter of four years, six months, and two days!

Haggai is just a very small book, the second shortest of all of the minor prophets, but, in these two chapters consisting of thirty-eight verses, we have something as fresh as the morning newspaper! If you fail to comprehend what I am saying, then read again about “God’s house lieth waste” (Hag. 1:4, 9), or “the remnant of the people” (1:12, 14; 2:2), and then make the application. Why? Because it is the time for us to “arise and build,” as well as to remember there was a reason for Jesus saying, “Fear not, little flock” (Luke 12:32). May we truly learn the value of Haggai.

CHAPTER 30

Commentary On The Book Of Haggai

Joseph Meador

Introduction

THE LIFE AND PROCLAMATION of the prophet Haggai have been the source of little serious comment outside of Scripture itself. When such commentary has occurred, as the late Anglican scholar E. B. Pusey states in his text **The Minor Prophets:**

It has been the wont of critics, in whose eyes the prophets were but poets, to speak of the style of Haggai as “tame, destitute of life and power,” showing “a marked decline in” what they call “prophetic inspiration.”¹

However, as Pusey points out:

The style of the sacred writers is, of course, conformed to their mission. Prophetic descriptions of the future are but incidental to the mission of Haggai. Preachers do not speak in poetry, but set before the people their faults or their duties in vivid earnest language.²

Indeed, as one turns to the Old Testament in order to study the life of Haggai, one finds certain and peculiar facts which make him not merely an interesting personality, but, more importantly, one who, as a

prophet, still possesses a message as vibrant and as relevant as when it was first uttered.

The Historical

Haggai informs us that the time of his prophecy occurred in the second year of King Darius I of Persia (520 B.C., cf. Hag. 1:1). In a specific sense, there were four separate prophecies³ that Haggai made within the year 520 B.C., and these are contained in the book that bears his name. Each one of these prophecies is introduced by fixed dating which ascribed them to the first day of the sixth month, Elul (August-September—Hag. 1:1, 15); the twenty-first day of the seventh month, Tishri (September-October—2:1); and the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, Chisleu (November-December—2:10, 20), respectively. The prophecies were given by Haggai in the second reign year of Darius I.⁴

Darius the First, who ruled for 36 years,⁵ was also known in related literature by the name Hystaspes.⁶ Secular documents from this period tend to be historically precise so that the rule of this Persian monarch can be dated 522-486 B.C.⁷ The governmental structure of Persia was built upon the Assyrian model but was far more efficient than its predecessor. The imperial system, first designed by Cyrus (559-529 B.C.) to administer his extensive dominions was carried to completion by Darius I. Four capitals (Susa, Ecbatana, Babylon, and Persepolis) were established in various parts of the empire. Too, the total empire was divided by Darius I into twenty-one provinces (or satrapies), each governed by a provincial governor called a satrap.⁸ The early years of the reign of Darius I were occupied in suppressing the revolts of conquered peoples as well as in improving the administrative organization of the state. In regard to the

latter, Darius I effected many social and political policies which advanced both his civilization and his own reputation. For instance, Darius I is credited with establishing fixed annual tribute from each province. He also standardized the economic currency and weights and measures, he repaired and completed a primitive canal from the Nile to the Red Sea, and he followed the example set by Cyrus of tolerating the institutions of subject peoples. Not only did he restore ancient temples and foster local cults, but he ordered his province of Egypt to codify the Egyptian laws in consultation with the native priests. In all, Darius I was a most humane and pluralistic monarch.⁹

The Prophetic

Haggai, as a Divine prophet, presented himself as a man of practical sense who desired to rekindle true spiritual motivation in the remnant of the southern kingdom. It is correct to observe that “the need was that people not only learn what they should do but be impelled to do it.”¹⁰ Therefore, as one analyzes Haggai as a prophetic spokesman for God, he “may be thought of as an articulate person who could speak with force and persuasion.”¹¹ His name in the Classical Hebrew language is descriptive of the feasts of Jehovah.¹² Although Haggai does not present any information regarding his personal life or background (he does not even mention the name of his father or the city from which he came), he nevertheless is reckoned as being a devoted and faithful servant of God. Indeed, this characteristic was always the primary requisite before a man was engaged by Jehovah in the prophetic ministry.

As Darius I was busy with the affairs of state, the Jews, as a dispossessed nation under Persian domination, were searching for solutions to their own problems. In the entire period from the rule of Cyrus (559-529 B.C.) to

Darius Hystaspes, there were various hindrances to the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, which are briefly alluded to in Scripture. In the sixth month of the second year of Darius (520 B.C.), the prophet Haggai was raised up to encourage Zerubbabel and to revive the hopes of the people of Israel concerning their promised redemption.¹³ However, when the plain architectural design of the temple was taken into negative account by the people when compared to the previous Temple of Solomon (Hag. 2:3; Zech. 4:10), it produced a despondency that Haggai sought to comfort. In spite of all of the difficulties involved, Haggai sought to motivate a renewed emphasis in finishing the temple project (Zech. 4:7-9). When Darius I learned of the rebuilding of the temple, he not only commanded that no hindrance should be laid in the way, but he even granted state assistance both for the rebuilding and for the regular maintenance of the sacrifices. The building consequently proceeded and the temple was finished and dedicated in the sixth year of Darius I (516 B.C.—Ezra 5-6).¹⁴

It is important to remember that, in addition to the three periods of Babylonian captivity to which the southern kingdom of Judah was formerly subject (605, 597, and 586 B.C.), there were also three periods when the captive exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem and Judah (538/537 B.C.—Ezra 1:1; 458 B.C.—Ezra 7:7; 445 B.C.—Neh. 2:1). The return of the exiled Jews took place under the domination of the Persian empire following the fall of Babylon. As the Persian monarch Cyrus ascended to the throne of world power, he issued a royal edict that would allow those Jews taken captive by the Babylonian army to be allowed to return to their native homeland. This decree was issued in the year 559 B.C. and is recorded twice in the Old Testament (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5; cf. 2 Chron.

36:22-23). Haggai was a prophet who exercised his office during this first exilic return, which took place in 536 B.C.¹⁵

The Textual

Consider Your Ways 1 (Hag. 1:1-6)

As Charles F. Kent observes, “Haggai wisely selected for his appeal the first day of the sixth month, when the people were assembled to celebrate the feast of the new moon.”¹⁶ The prophet spoke to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and to Joshua the high priest remonstrating both the political and spiritual leaders of Judah for allowing the temple of Jehovah to go uncompleted while the mass populace was busy building their own houses. The prophet told the leaders to “Consider your ways” (1:5). Indeed, those in leadership positions have a responsibility to pave the way and set the standards for others to follow. Zerubbabel and Joshua needed to exercise their influence for good and help the southern kingdom set the spiritual priorities needed for success.

Consider Your Ways 2 (1:7-15)

Haggai began to explain to the two leaders that much of the trouble that the nation was having was related to their neglect of God’s house. He again told them to “Consider your ways” (1:7) regarding their attitudes of apathy and procrastination. The people were reminded by Haggai that, since they had stopped work on the temple sixteen years earlier, they had not prospered, nor had they been blessed by the Lord as they should have been. At this point, both Zerubbabel and Joshua communicated God’s dissatisfaction to the people of Judah. The response on the part of the nation was immediate and hearty. By the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, the work was instituted. Since after the exile the Jews adopted the

Babylonian system of reckoning time and in 520 B.C. the Babylonian year seems to have begun on the first of May, the building of the second temple was started in October.¹⁷

Consider Your Ways 3 (2:1-17)

Because many of the older inhabitants of Judah remembered the former glory of the temple that Solomon built, they did not feel motivated to work on a structure that would not be so grand. It was approximately one month later, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, when the people showed signs of discouragement, that Haggai delivered to them, at the Feast of Tabernacles, another prophecy. This second prophecy of Haggai was designed to give encouragement to the people to continue their work on the temple. Two Divine commands were given to the nation. First they were to be strong (literally, to be conquerors of the task). Second, they were to work (literally, to busy themselves as with a burden). The Lord promised to be with them as long as they remained active. Indeed, the Divine prescription for spiritual sickness, individually or collectively, is to “get to work.”

Concerning Haggai 2:6-9, E. W. Hengstenberg, in his classic four-volume treatise **Christology of the Old Testament**, devotes some twenty-eight pages to a detailed discussion of these verses in relation to Messianic prophecy.¹⁸ These verses point to a future temple, which would be fulfilled, in the primary sense, by that of the second Jewish temple and, in the ultimate sense, by the establishment of the eternal kingdom, the church of Christ. Also included in this Messianic prophecy is the scope or dominion of the Lord of hosts.

The third prophecy of Haggai occurred on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Here, the prophet uses the sacrificial laws as an object lesson to the people. Turning to some of the priests, he inquires, “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 meat, shall it be holy?" Of course the Levitical priests answered "No." Then Haggai asked, "If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall he be unclean?" As the priests responded "Yes," he applied the illustration: "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." Haggai then exhorted them, "Consider from this day and upward" (2:15).¹⁹ By failure of crops, blasting, mildew, and destructive hailstorms, Jehovah had endeavored to impress upon the people of Judah their need to restore their first love and priority.

Consider Your Ways 4 (2:18-23)

Now that the people had obeyed the voice of God through the prophet Haggai, they would receive blessings from God that would continue as long as they kept God first in their attitudes and actions. Haggai told the people:

Consider, now from this day and upward...from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day I will bless you (Hag. 2:18-19).

The fourth and final prophecy of Haggai is found in verses twenty through twenty-three.

Here, the Lord told Haggai to speak to Zerubbabel concerning his office as governor or leader of Judah. These verses constitute another Messianic prophecy of secondary note in that the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:11-14 is now revived in Zerubbabel, who is a direct descendant of David through Coniah (Jer. 22:24-30) and, thus, one

through whom the Messianic seed would come (Matt. 1:12). It is interesting to note that this fact, properly understood, is a deathblow to the erroneous teaching of premillennialists that Christ will one day rule in Jerusalem on David's throne for a thousand years. In essence, the argument from Scripture against this view is presented as follows. Jehoiakim was the father of Jeconiah (also known as Coniah—1 Chron. 3:16; Jer. 22:24); Coniah was in turn the father of Shealtiel (1 Chron. 3:17). Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:23). God had made a Divine promise that no descendant of Coniah would ever again sit upon the throne and rule in Judah (Jer. 22:24-30). Therefore, Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah of God, being a physical descendant of Coniah (Matt. 1:12), will not sit on an earthly throne and rule in Judah.

Finally, as God had before intervened in the affairs of men, so He would again in order to establish universal recognition of the temple. The temple would once again be the seat of true Jewish spiritual power. As such, Judah's competitive spiritual opponents would be made subject, and Zerubbabel's authority would be nationalized as "continuing the Davidic line as a new, independent and authoritative leader."²⁰

Endnotes

1 E. B. Pusey, **The Minor Prophets With a Commentary Explanatory and Practical and Introductions to the Several Books**, Volume 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 293.

2 Ibid.

3 Leon J. Wood, **The Prophets of Israel** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 368ff.

4 Norman L. Geisler, **A Popular Survey of the Old Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), p.292.

5 James B. Prichard, **The Ancient Near East**, Volume 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 119.

6 D. J. Wiseman, "Haggai: Introduction," **The New Bible Commentary Revised**, eds. D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 781.

7 Edward M. Burns and Phillip Lee Ralph, **World Civilizations: Their History and Culture**, 5th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), p. 70.

8 T. Walter Wallbank and Alastair M. Taylor, **Civilization Past and Present**, 4th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1960), p. 59.

9 Burns, p. 70.

10 Woods, p. 368.

11 Ibid.

12 R. Laird Harris, ed., **Theological Word Book of the Old Testament**, Volume 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 261.

13 J. A. Thompson, **The Bible and Archaeology** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 187.

14 Revere Franklin Weidner, **Biblical Theology of the Old Testament** (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), p. 250.

15 Wiseman, p. 781.

16 Charles Foster Kent, **A History of the Jewish People During the Babylonian, Persian, and Greek Periods** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 141.

17 Ibid.

18 E.W. Hengstenberg, **Christology of the Old Testament and A Commentary on the Messianic Predictions**, Volume 3, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), p. 238.

19 D. J. Wiseman notes in his article, "Haggai: Commentary," p. 784, that this phrase, "Consideration this day and upward," "was customary in drawing up ancient legal documents involving new pledges."

20 Wiseman, p. 785.

CHAPTER 31

Great Lessons From The Book Of Haggai

Gary McDade

Introduction

THE PREACHING OF THE post-exilic prophet Haggai is dated 520 B.C., during the second year of the reign of the Persian king Darius I Hystaspes (522-486 B.C.). The decree of the Persian king Cyrus (559-530 B.C.) mentioned in 2 Chronicles 36:20-23 and Ezra 1:1-4 provided for the return of the Jewish captives to their homeland. The intent of the decree is also verified archaeologically by the famous Cylinder of Cyrus discovered at Babylon by Hormuzd Rassam in 1879-1882. In 538 B.C. Cyrus' decree was issued, and by 536 B.C., under the leadership of Zerubbabel, about 50,000 Jews had returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64-67). The foundation of the temple was laid, but for about the next sixteen years the attention of the people was diverted toward their own personal interests, especially the building and beautifying of their own houses (Hag. 1:4). It is at this point in time that Haggai begins his prophecy, which urges the people to give up their selfish interests and their lethargic attitude about the state of the temple. The main point of Haggai's message was, "Build God's Temple!"

The book of Haggai presents the prophecy in four messages. The first message, delivered in the sixth month Elul (August-September), called attention to the fact that

God was not blessing them because they were not putting God's work first (1:1-15). The second message, delivered in the seventh month Tishri (September-October), comforted and encouraged the people concerning the superior quality of this second temple which they had now begun (2:1-9). The third message, delivered in the ninth month Chislev (December-January), discussed how their former attitude concerning the temple had caused God to withhold blessings from them, but from this point onward their renewed attitude would promote God's blessings (2:10-19). And the fourth message, delivered the same day as the third message, promised God's protection on Zerubbabel and triumph over the heathen nations (2:20-23). His blessings toward Zerubbabel extend into the Messianic prophecy (Matt. 1:12-13; Luke 3:27). So the book of Haggai contains four messages and covers a four-month period.

The Prophet Haggai

Although details of Haggai's personal life are not mentioned, his sterling character has abundant attestation. He is bold in approaching the governor and the high priest with God's challenging message. He is courageous in stressing that the people "consider their ways." He is compassionate in his encouragement to the people that God is with them and will bless them. He is successful as a preacher and prophet because, within four months, construction of the temple was already underway. Haggai shows that a preacher does not have to be famous to be useful.

The Men Haggai Motivated

Haggai initially spoke to Zerubbabel and Joshua the son of Josedech about the apathy and selfishness of the people. He spoke to the governor of Judah and to the high

priest, respectively. The men Haggai motivated comprised the leadership. There is wisdom in beginning with the duly constituted leadership in correcting problems. Today, the scripturally organized church of the Lord has within its membership men whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers (Acts 20:28). Observation teaches that congregations seldom rise above the aspirations of their elderships. Even men of fair ability can lead a congregation to great avenues of service for the Lord. God's people want to be led in right paths. Perhaps that is what Peter meant when he exhorted the elders to "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (1 Pet. 5:2). Haggai began to motivate the people by motivating their leadership.

"This People Say..."

Haggai wrote, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. 1:2). Often in the Bible, what the people say and what God says are two different and opposite utterances. Moses said, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment" (Exod. 23:2). Isaiah wrote, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). The Lord Himself said:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9).

Today, "this people say" God is pleased with many churches, but the Word of God says there is "but one body," "the church" (1 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 1:22-23). "This people say"

no one can legislate morality, but the Bible says, “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psm. 107:6-7). Many have “forsaken the right way” (2 Pet. 2:15). “This people say” there is no authority for congregational singing, but the Bible says, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). “This people say” elders have no authority, when the Bible says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). “This people say” there is no pattern to follow in doing God’s will, but the Bible says, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Tim. 1:16; cf. Tit. 2:7; Heb. 9:23). “This people say” there is no problem with adding instrumental music to the worship, but the Bible says, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18). Haggai first addressed his audience with what the people said in contrast to what God wanted. He was not arrogant, illogical, or rude by so doing; he was right. The faithful preacher will do likewise.

“Consider Your Ways”

The measure of Haggai’s success is tied to the phrase “consider your ways” (Hag. 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18). A marginal reading has “Set your heart on your ways.” The results of their conduct had yielded scarcity in the material provisions of life. Their values were imbalanced. More attention and energy had been devoted to building their own houses than to the building of the Lord’s house, the temple. They did not have time to build the Lord’s house,

but they had time to dwell in their own ceiled or paneled houses. The Hebrew word Haggai used, possibly referring to roofing beams and decorative panels, is **sapan** (see also 1 Kings 6:9; 7:7), and an Aramaic and Babylonian word, meaning “flattened” or “crushed,” that would describe the Lord’s house is **sapanu**. Haggai may have used the word translated “ceiled” to provide such a play on words for the benefit of the original readers. The Lord’s house lay in ruins while their houses were beautiful and luxurious. Haggai’s statement, “Consider your ways,” is an instruction for the people to seriously reflect on their priorities.

Christians can benefit from Haggai’s words, “Consider your ways.” Jesus taught, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Today, the Lord’s house is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). While the houses of most Christians abound in comfort, luxury, entertainment, nourishment, recreation, communication, hobbies, and more, the Lord’s house lacks preachers, teachers, and personal workers. Every man runs to his own house (Hag. 1:9). In fact, some will not even leave to worship God or attend Bible study. It would be wonderful if families were rushing home to enjoy the fellowship of the faithful and to talk of all God’s wondrous works, but most cannot even find time to read the Bible at home (1 Tim. 4:13). Instead of lavishing money, time, and energy on selfish interests, the Lord would have His people “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” with the assurance that the material blessings will be provided. “Consider your ways.”

“A Bag With Holes”

In his discussion of the futility of wrong priorities, Haggai wrote:

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat,
but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not

filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes (Hag. 1:6).

For about sixteen years the Jews had labored expecting bountiful yields from their crops (1:9), but they were laboring in vain. In **The Firm Foundation**, (February 25, 1986), Johnny Ramsey told of some “bags full of holes today” (p. 24). He gave seven:

1. Superficial Responses.
2. Social Club Religion.
3. Preachers Who Seldom Study.
4. Elders Who Fail To Watch For Souls.
5. Parents Who Stress Material Values.
6. Folk Who Postpone Obedience.
7. Brethren Who Drift Away From God.

Three more bags with holes are the Boston/Crossroads multiplying ministries and its gargantuan effort to restructure the church of Christ, the “New Unity” movement with its false teachings that there are devout Christians among all the denominations, and, associated with it, the “New Hermeneutic,” which is nothing more than the old heresy that denies the plain and powerful Word of God. Jesus pleaded, “Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth” (Luke 12:33).

“I Am With You”

The Bible says in Haggai 1:13, “Then spake Haggai the Lord’s messenger in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.” Four factors that brought forth the statement “I am with you” are: (1) the people obeyed the voice of the Lord (1:12); (2) “the people did fear before the Lord” (1:12); (3) the people had their spirit stirred up or were zealous (1:14); (4) “they came

and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God” (1:14). It is obvious that Jesus expects the same disposition of the church today, for He said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20): “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

The Chastening Of The Lord

In Haggai’s third message, he recalled the conditions prior to the time when the people began to work and to build the temple. He recalled the scarcity, the mildew, and the hail (Hag. 2:15-17). He reminded the people that they did not immediately turn when those things were going on. The Lord was rehearsing the chastisement He brought on them. Now that they were being blessed, God’s explanation of the chastisement served to reinforce the lessons learned from it. God’s blessings are available to the obedient (2:19). Three times in two verses he admonished the people to “consider” what took place (2:15, 18). The Lord chastens because He loves (Heb. 12:5-6). God’s message through Haggai seems to have the same point as that to the Hebrews:

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (12:11-13).

Kingdom Prophecies

Haggai spoke of God’s making Zerubbabel a chosen signet (Hag. 2:23). The reference is to the continuation of

the Davidic line and the promises concerning David's royal descendant Jesus Christ (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Christ is a descendant of Zerubbabel (Matt. 1:12-13; Luke 3:27). The greater glory of Zerubbabel's temple relates to the fact that in it the Messiah would stand and teach (Matt. 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 19:47; 22:53; John 18:20). Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6). The statements in Haggai 2:6-9, and 21-23, of the shaking of heaven, earth, and the nations, with emphasis upon the superiority of God's kingdom, finds fulfillment in the church/kingdom of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19). Christ was raised from the dead to sit on David's throne (Acts 2:30-36). The Hebrews writer quoted from Haggai when he wrote:

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:26-29).

The ultimate victory of Christ's kingdom is heralded in Revelation 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Additional Sermon Topics From Haggai

1. The Lord's House Should Be Built (1:2, 8)
2. Things In Which God Takes Pleasure (1:8)
3. "I Will Be Glorified" (1:8)
4. "Ye Looked For Much" (1:9)
5. When God Withholds His Blessings (1:9-11)

6. "Be Strong And Work" (2:4-9)
7. What God Will Do (2:6-9, 19-23).

Conclusion

The people to whom Haggai prophesied went to work on the construction of the temple right away (Ezra 5:1-2). Within four years the temple had been completed (6:13-15). Haggai was successful. He spoke the Word of the Lord. In fact, "Thus saith the Lord," or its equivalent, appears twenty-six times in his thirty-eight verses. The success of God's spokesmen today depends upon their presentation of the Word of God. The Word is to be preached (2 Tim. 4:2). And God has promised to give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

CHAPTER 32

Introduction To The Book Of Zechariah

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

Introduction

IN THE EIGHTH MONTH, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying” (Zech. 1:1). The dates given in the opening verse of Zechariah show that the prophet was contemporary with Haggai. Both prophesied after the Babylonian exile and during the period of the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. According to Ezra 4:24, the work on the edifice had ceased until the second year of Darius—sixteen years after the building first began. A letter had been written to Ahasuerus (Cambyses, who ruled from 529-522 B.C.) and then to Artaxerxes (Pseudo-Smerdis who ruled from 533 B.C.). Artaxerxes had listened to the inhabitants of the land and had the work stopped (Ezra 4:23).

Darius (Hystaspes II), however, received a letter from the inhabitants of Palestine who were upset that Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 5:6) had begun to work in the temple. Those ancient opposers of God’s work questioned whether Cyrus had ever decreed anything to be done in restoring Jerusalem (5:8-17). Darius ordered a search of Persian records and found such an edict (6:1-5). The order was sent to the Palestinians to leave the work alone and to let it proceed (6:6-12).

The work of Zechariah was focused upon restoration. That great prophet urged a return to the leadership and power of God in Israel (Zech. 4:6). The purpose here is to examine Zechariah's name, character message, apocalyptic, and lessons.

His Name

The name "Zechariah" means "whom God (Jehovah) remembers." This popular Hebrew name is mentioned twenty-seven times in the Old Testament.¹ According to Nehemiah 12:4, 16, Zechariah was the descendant of priests. Some have wondered why Ezra failed to mention Berechiah as the father of Zechariah and only listed him as "the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Hailey speculates that Berechiah may have died shortly after the return from Babylon, leaving Zechariah "next in line to his grandfather."² Others surmise that Iddo, in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, was the head of the house, thus a more remote ancestor than grandfather.³ Some have even tried to argue that Berechiah's name was inserted in error!⁴

A tradition that Zechariah was "advanced in age" when he returned from Babylon and then died at a great age and was buried beside Haggai does not fit the Bible facts.⁵ According to Zechariah 1:7, the prophet began teaching in "the second year of Darius." Zechariah was a "young man" (**na-ar**) then (2:4). The second year of Darius' reign was about 520 B.C., and, if Zechariah lived until 470 B.C. as some suggest, he was not "advanced in age" when he returned from Babylon.⁶

Jesus referred to a "Zechariah son of Berechiah" who was slain "between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35; cf. Luke 11:51). Some opine that the prophet suffered martyrdom. Others feel that the Zechariah mentioned by Jesus is the same one mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22.⁷

If the latter view is taken, one may surmise that Jesus “bracketed” the Old Testament canon from Genesis to 2 Chronicles.

His Character

The prophecies of Zechariah extend from the second year of Darius (520 B.C.) to the fourth year of that Persian king (518 B.C.).

Zechariah began one month before Haggai ceased (Hag. 2:18; Zech. 1:1). Since Nehemiah identifies Zechariah as a priest, this man was talented enough to hold two offices—prophet and priest (Neh. 12:4). This gives an “additional reason for his concern for the immediate rebuilding of the temple.”⁸

Being a priest, Zechariah is used by God to add impetus to the work of restoring the temple. Haggai offered material prosperity as a reward for finishing the temple (Hag. 2:19, 22). Zechariah, however, using oracles and visions (especially does he use visions!), offers the hope of Messiah as incentive to finish rebuilding (see, for example, Zech. 9:9).

Robinson offers a succinct view of Zechariah as a Messianic prophet:

the scope of the prophet’s vision and the spiritual profundity of his thought challenge the most earnest reflection. In fact, it is no exaggeration to affirm that of all the prophetic compositions of the Old Testament, Zechariah’s visions and oracles are the most messianic, and accordingly, the most difficult, because they are mingled and intermingled with so much that is apocalyptic and eschatological.⁹

As a priest, Zechariah would be a student of Scripture. As a prophet, his visionary method may indicate a man of study and meditation. Paterson says of him: Haggai will

handle the hammer and nails, but Zechariah will supply the blueprints of Utopia. The spiritual insight of the idealist will be wedded to the practical drive of the realists.¹⁰

His Message

Zechariah writes in the realm of ideas. His aim is to establish the “rule of God” (Zech. 1:3, 16; 2:10; 6:13; 8:3, 8; 9:1-17; 10:11; et al.). His message divides clearly into two parts—chapters one through eight (dated prophecies in the form of visions) and chapters nine through fourteen, which are highly visionary and Messianic.

Chapters nine through fourteen are attacked by modernists as not from the pen of Zechariah. Some, using Matthew 27:9-10, argue that Jeremiah wrote these chapters. Others argue for a “Deutero-Zechariah” who wrote after the time of Zechariah. Still others argue for several “Deuteronomistic” authors in the time of the Maccabeans.¹¹ New Testament writers, inspired of the Holy Spirit, quote Zechariah. Not one of those authors mentioned a “Deutero-Zechariah” or any other “Deuteronomist” as author! If Zechariah wrote the last chapters several decades after the first eight chapters, as Archer suggests,¹² this would easily account for the few differences in style. Too, there are few if any “Aramaisms” in Zechariah.¹³ The Aramaic, however, was common in the Maccabean era.

Zechariah, as earlier prophets, strongly emphasizes the moral and spiritual (Zech. 1:4). Unlike the former prophets, however, war and riot are not present for this prophet. Zechariah views the rule of God as built “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (4:6). In order for God to rule, there must be a purified people (13:1), an anointed ruler (6:12-13), and a

unified “temple” (10:1-12). New Testament students will recognize that Zechariah was describing the church age.

Mention has already been made that the book of Zechariah is “highly Messianic.” Note the following:

1. Christ is to be a servant called the BRANCH (3:8).
2. Christ will build the temple, the church (6:12).
3. Christ will be a King and a Priest on His throne (6:13). His throne is in heaven (Psm. 89:35-37). He cannot be priest on earth (Heb. 8:4), and His priesthood never changes (7:24). Therefore, Christ will never rule on earth as premillennialists try to teach.
4. Christ will enter Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey (Zech. 9:9).
5. Christ will be a Shepherd (9:16; 11:11).
6. Christ will be a smitten Shepherd (13:7).
7. Christ will be betrayed for thirty-pieces of silver (11:12-13).
8. Christ will be a fountain for salvation (13:1).
9. Christ will be pierced (12:10).
10. Christ will be “wounded in the house of my friends”—i.e., the Jews (13:6).

These are a few of the startling prophecies of Zechariah. His message, because of its apocalyptic language and its visions, is hard to interpret. But his clear statements about Messiah seem obvious.

His Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic is the language of a persecuted or troubled people. According to Revelation 1:1, that apocalyptic message came from Christ through an angel to John and included visions of future events. In that sense, Zechariah is apocalyptic. An “angel of God” (Zech. 1:13ff) explains a series of night visions from God to Zechariah (1:7-6:15).

Too, Zechariah uses a present person as a type of the future (6:12). Such usage is typical of apocalyptic language. A gold crown is pictured as placed on Joshua's head (6:11), and then a Messianic role is prophesied (6:12-13). Since Messiah was to be in the Davidic line, and since Zerubbabel was then governor, some "scholars" who do not understand apocalyptic have said that this was an attempt by Zechariah to crown Zerubbabel as Messiah!¹⁴ Zechariah spoke of a lampstand, olive trees, horses and chariots, strange colors, and other figurative things. Surely no reasonable person can take the "crowning" of Joshua literally. It is highly figurative language concerning the coming of Jesus the Christ.

Zechariah's message is so strong concerning the Christ that approximately seventy-one quotations from the prophet occur in the New Testament. Most (thirty-one) are located in Revelation, but twenty-seven are in accounts of the Gospel, especially during the last week of Jesus' ministry. Obviously the inspired New Testament writers were convinced that Zechariah's apocalyptic language was pointing to Jesus.

His Lessons

Sometimes, after years of difficulty or years of service, one's faith or the faith of a congregation can weaken. Zechariah's primary lesson is that such a faith can be strengthened through the preaching of God's message: "But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned" (Zech. 1:6a). The preacher is instructed to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Why? Because faith weakens without such preaching (4:3) and, without Bible preaching, there is no faith (Rom. 10:17). Preaching God's Word saves "them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

A second lesson from Zechariah is learned by noticing his appeal to the “former prophets” (Zech. 1:4; 7:12). Their writings were thus God’s Word and had been sent by God’s Spirit (7:12): “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16a). It was not the prophets who postulated the message, for they are gone, but the Word is forever (Zech. 1:5-6). However, a rash of professors in “our” schools is resisting plenary, verbal inspiration and adopting utter “thought” inspiration or “historical gathering.” That is, they teach that the writers of the Bible received thoughts or impulses that were “religious” and produced the messages. A warning is issued here that verbal inspiration is under attack in the brotherhood of the church of Christ. Known to this writer is one professor who said in class that he would not defend anyone’s “fifty-year-old theology on inspiration.” Another professor said, “I do not believe in verbal inspiration and I do not want a discussion about it.” Such fundamental heresy is destroying the faith of many.

A third lesson is drawn from Zechariah’s insistence that the true faith would one day be universal (2:11; 6:15; 8:23; 14:16).

A better “house of God” waited in the future (1:16; 13:1). Since better days lie ahead, it thus behooves the faithful to hope against hope (4:6). The contest between good and evil will result in victory for the good (14:9, 11).

Conclusion

God has remembered His people in every generation. Zechariah (“he whom Jehovah remembers”) is a message of restoration, resurgence, and hope. The prophet of Israel, of course, was pointing to Messiah!

Endnotes

1 Robert Young, “Zechariah,” **Analytical Concordance to the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 1087.

2 Homer Hailey, "Zechariah," **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 316.

3 William S. Lasor, David A. Hubbard, Frederick W. Bush, "Zechariah," **Old Testament Survey** (Grand Rapids, MI; William B. Eerdmans, 1982), p. 489.

4 John Paterson, "Zechariah: The Prophet as Idealist," **The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 227.

5 Lasor et al., p. 490.

6 Ibid.

7 Hailey, p. 316.

8 See Stephen Winward, "Zechariah," **A Guide to the Prophets** (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), p. 196.

9 George L. Robinson, "Zechariah the Seer," **The Twelve Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 148.

10 Paterson, p. 228.

11 See G. L. Archer, **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), pp. 429-37, and R. K. Harrison, **Introduction to the Old Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969), pp. 952-956, for the arguments for unity of authorship and the arguments against.

12 Archer, pp. 515ff.

13 Ibid.

14 Lasor et al., p. 494.

CHAPTER 33

Commentary On The Book Of Zechariah

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Commendation

IT IS A JOY deeply appreciated to speak on the second annual **POWER** Lectureship. Both the lectureship and the recently begun quarterly are ardently, aptly, and accurately designated “**POWER**.” My personal thanks to brethren Elkins and Warren, the elders here at Southaven, and this fine congregation for this invitation to participate. A study of the Minor Prophets is just as timely in 1990 as Providence was in 1989. Our brethren have not written a great deal on this segment of Sacred Scripture. This beautiful book will help fill a noticeable void in our literature. This book, like the one on Providence, will be a lifetime companion to all of us; we will never outgrow either one. I eagerly look forward to reading it entirely and then keeping it handy for reference the rest of my preaching life.

Zechariah: The Man And His Book Introduced

Zechariah is eleventh in the current listing of the Minor Prophets. It is the longest of these twelve prophetic books. Though Hosea and Zechariah both have fourteen chapters, the latter is longer in both verses and actual words than is Hosea. Verses in Zechariah, as a general rule, are longer than in Hosea.

Zechariah was a common and popular name among Bible people. There are some thirty Old Testament men who wore this designation. The name means “whom Jehovah remembers.” Zechariah had a good name at birth. By precious piety and prophetic faithfulness, he added lovely luster to a name already noble. He was the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo. He was of the Levitical tribe and of priestly descent as per Nehemiah 12:1, 4, 16.

He was contemporary with Haggai and teamed with him to inspire procrastinating Israel to finish the temple, which had been begun sixteen years before and now stood in a construction halt. Haggai was an older man and Zechariah a younger man. Yet there was no generation gap, for both were faithful at God’s prophetic post of demanded duties. Haggai began his work about two months prior to Zechariah’s beginning ministry as Jehovah’s called prophet. Zechariah began to prophesy in the second year of Darius’ reign. This would have been around 520 B.C. To exhibit how effective the prophetic ministry of this dynamic duet of prophets was, the temple was completed within four years, or 516 B.C. They were highly successful seers.

As a prophet he was God’s spokesman or mouthpiece. A prophet was one who had been to God and was returning to the people with a message; a priest was a man who had been to the people and was returning to God with a gift as a sacrificial officiant at the specified altar. Close students of Zechariah recognize him as a forthteller (having a message applicable to his own era) and a foreteller (as he drew aside the curtains of the future and told about the coming Messiah and His reign on earth within human hearts).

Next to Isaiah he is the most Messianic of Old Testament prophets and by far the most Messianic among the twelve minor prophets.

Zechariah speaks of two temples. The first one was the physical edifice upon Mount Moriah begun sixteen years before but which was now on construction hold among indifferent Jews, who were far more concerned in building their ceiled houses than in completing Jehovah's temple on Moriah. The second temple is the one to be built by the Branch—the Mighty Messiah. We know this to be the church. What is taught by the Christ in Matthew 16:18 is richly reminiscent of Zechariah's dynamic declaration in Zechariah 6:12-13.

Much has been written relative to the unity of this book. Comments will be made in full view and with total acceptance of Zechariah as lone penman with the Holy Spirit as heavenly author. Zechariah is one of those men Peter had in mind in writing 2 Peter 1:21—i.e., holy men of God spoke as they were moved (borne along) by the Holy Spirit. I have counted personally at least eighty-four allusions of where Zechariah attributed his message to God. This is an average of six times per chapter.

Zechariah Outlined

I. Various visions vouchsafed Zechariah (Zech. 1-6).

- A. The prophetic introduction (1:1).
 - B. God's displeasure and a demand for the people's return to God (1:2-6).
 - C. The rider and horsemen among the myrtle trees (1:7-17).
 - D. The four horns and four smiths (1:18-21).
 - E. The man with the measuring line in hand (2:1-13).
 - F. Joshua, the high priest, and the Branch (3:1-10).
 - G. The candlestick or lampstand and the two olive trees (4:1-14).
 - H. The flying roll (5:1-4)
 - I. The woman in the midst of the ephah (5:5-11).
 - J. The four chariots and horses of varying colors (6:1-8).
-

- K. The Branch who will build Jehovah's spiritual temple (6:9-15).
- L. These six chapters were designed to show the people God's mercy, their need of repentance, and what God proposed to do for His people.

II. Interest in, inquiries about, and answers relative to fasting (chps. 7-8).

- A. Their inquiries and Zechariah's words of reproof (7:1-14).
- B. Jehovah's encouragement of His people (8:1-23).

III. Messianic pointers (chps. 9-14).

- A. The coming of the meek and just King (9:1-17).
- B. Jehovah's interest in His people (10:1-12).
- C. The Messiah to be sold for thirty pieces of silver (11:1-17).
- D. The Messiah to be pierced (12:1-14).
- E. The cleansing fountain and the smitten shepherd (13:1-9).
- F. Jerusalem's A.D. 70 destruction and Messianic times depicted (14:1-21).

IV. Twelve lessons learned from Zechariah.

- A. These will be numbered and noted at the conclusion of our study.
- B. This enables us to make some applications from the book helpful to us.

Conclusion: We have now sat at the feet of a good and great man and studied a book that is rich and regal with the heavenly message vouchsafed humanity.

Prophetic Introduction (1:1)

The eighth month would correspond to our October/November. Darius the Great, grandson of Cyrus, is in his

second year of reign. The time was 520 B.C. The prophet gives both his father and grandfather, Berechiah and Iddo, respectively, by name. He is the human recipient of a Divine message vouchsafed him.

God's Displeasure And Their Need To Repent (1:2-6)

vv. 2-4: The past disobedience of their impious ancestors greatly displeased Jehovah. He speaks as Lord of hosts (power/might). The people, Zechariah's peers, are challenged to return to God. Just as promptly, He will turn to them. Past prophets had pleaded powerfully and persistently for adamant Israel to change her ways of waywardness. She was adamant in refusing to repent and change. She would neither hear nor heed Deity's directives.

vv. 5-6: That adamant generation perished. The prophets who sought to help them have died. God's Word, in marked contrast, remains and stands firm. Yet those impious Israelites of the past did not take seriously God's message. The past captivity in Chaldea showed that their sins had caught up with them. Payday for sin would not escape Zechariah's pernicious peers either.

The Rider And Horsemen Among The Myrtles (1:7-17)

v. 7: Three months later (January/February), God spoke again to Zechariah. Again and again Zechariah attributes his message to the Lord.

vv. 8-11: This is the first of eight visions vouchsafed Zechariah in the beginning of his prophetic career. He observed a rider upon a red horse amidst myrtle trees located in the bottom (low area) followed by other riders on horses red, speckled (sorrel—ASV) and white. Without question this is the Second Person of Deity, Who made many Old Testament appearances. He is called the Angel

of the Lord in verses eleven and twelve. Zechariah inquires of their mission and is informed that Jehovah had sent them to walk to and fro through earth. They report findings to the Lord that “the earth sitteth still, and is at rest” (v. 11).

v. 12: The Angel (Second Person) inquires of Jehovah as touching how long Jerusalem and Judah will be minus mercy. The seventy years from 606 to 536 B.C. were already past. The seventy years from 586 when the temple was destroyed till its rebuilding completion in 516 were almost concluded. God’s wrath had been visited during this period.

vv. 13-14: Jehovah answers the Angel (Second Person) with words both good and comfortable. Zechariah is then given a message to proclaim relative to Jehovah’s jealousy for Zion.

vv. 15-17: Jehovah had used the heathen to punish His own people, but they had exceeded in cruelty what He intended. The heathen are now in the forefront of God’s signal displeasure. Jehovah has returned to Zion with mercy ready to dispense. The temple surely would be rebuilt, and a line shall be stretched upon Jerusalem. Abundant mercy is on Zion’s threshold; prosperity was ready to return.

The Four Horses And Four Carpenters (Smiths) (1:18-21)

vv. 18-19: Before Zechariah’s uplifted eyes, there appeared the four horns. Horns refer to powers. Zechariah inquired of their meaning. He is promptly informed that they are the great powers which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia had all done this and may be the import of this second vision. Since this seems to refer to past scatterings, it is not too likely he includes Daniel’s four great powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The former two could have been included.

vv. 20-21: Zechariah is then shown four carpenters (smiths, artificers). We would style them blacksmiths. The young, zealous prophet inquires of them. He is told of their former purpose in chastising God's disobedient people. Now they would fray (terrify) and cast down the very powers Jehovah had used to discipline His people. Every nation is amenable to God and must answer ultimately to Him.

The Man With The Measuring Line In Hand (2:1-13)

v. 1: This is the third of the eight visions vouchsafed Zechariah. Meeting his uplifted and eager eyes is the man with the measuring line in hand.

vv. 2-5: The prophet inquires into the meaning of what he had just seen. He is told by the man with the measuring line that Jerusalem's breadth and length are to be measured. Is literal Jerusalem in the purview, or spiritual Jerusalem? Perhaps the latter, for literal Jerusalem from antiquity has been a walled city. The older part of it still is. This Jerusalem is minus walls, enjoys great blessings of safety and security from the Lord, and in it He finds His glory. The Jerusalem that is above or spiritual Zion better fits. Remember how great and glorious Paul depicts the church in his great masterpiece—Ephesians.

vv. 6-9: Before the dawning of the great Messianic Age, God had a purpose for the remnant who returned from Chaldean captivity. God's people, who have been scattered to the four winds, were still the apple of His eye. His eternal purpose of saving man through Christ rested in them. God would have His glory by what would be unfurled against their enemies.

vv. 10-13: God's people are called upon to rejoice due to Deity's dwelling among them. The passage is too restricted if placed just in the confines of Jerusalem under

Judaism. Many nations are to be joined to the Lord. This finds fulfillment under the auspices of the Great Commission, wherein all nations are lovingly comprehended. This was not true of Judaistic Jerusalem or Mosaic Zion. In those great and golden Messianic times, God's people would know a wealth of security with no earthly parallel since Eden. The holy land is not Palestine, but God's people. Wherever God and His people are there is the holy land—not a geographical area at the eastern extremity of the mighty Mediterranean Sea. Human flesh is charged to be silent before Jehovah. This especially applied to Judaistic Jews who could not and would not look any further into God's overall plan than just the temple now being built on Moriah and just a restoration of Jacob's physical descendants to that narrow compass of land. God's plans and purposes were far greater and grander than that circumscribed view.

Joshua, The High Priest, And The Branch (3:1-10)

vv. 1-2: Here we have Zechariah's fourth vision. There was a Joshua who settled Israel in Canaan initially; here is a Joshua who helps them resettle the land; Jesus or Joshua (the names mean the same) pioneers the way for the settlement of his people in a greater Canaan. Joshua is high priest. He is before the Lord's Angel (Second Person), and Satan (adversary, accuser) stands as the resisting enemy. Satan is rebuked. Jerusalem is the Lord's chosen, though He had chastised them severely. A remnant still remained, through whom He would work out His redemptive plan.

vv. 3-5: Joshua represented all Israel. His apparel of filthy garments symbolized their sins and pollutions. The Lord's taking away of the filthy garments and replacing such with clean raiment exhibits that pardon has been

extended. The mitre referred to the priestly bonnet or turban. Joshua's wearing it signified that the priesthood had been renewed to him. Priestly vestments (garments) are given to show God's acceptance. The Lord's Angel stands by, witnessing it all and with full approval manifested.

vv. 6-7: The Lord's Angel (Second Person) continues to speak and act for the First Person. His protest to Joshua is a solemn and earnest charge. It is twofold in nature. (1) Joshua is to be righteous in his own personal deportment. (2) He is to be faithful in the discharge of his priestly duties. The promised reward for such priestly fidelity is threefold. (1) He will be the ruler and director over God's house (the temple now under construction). (2) He will keep the Lord's temple free from all idols, pollutions, etc. (3) He will have access to Jehovah on behalf of himself and the whole nation which he represents at the priestly altar.

vv. 8-10: Joshua and his fellow priestly colleagues are charged to hear. They are called a wonder or a sign in the sense that God intended in His long-range plans to bring in the high priesthood of the Christ, where there would be a fullness of access never available under the Levitical priesthood. The Branch refers to the Christ and is richly reminiscent of other prophetic pointers to the Second Person (cf. Isa. 42:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 6:12). He would be Jehovah's servant and would do His full bidding (John 4:34; 6:38; 8:29; 17:3-4; Heb. 10:5ff). In this August Person the offices of priest and king would be combined. The stone refers to the Messiah and His kingdom, in which there would be spiritual completion. It would not be a rough, unhewn, or unpolished stone, but one hewn and polished to spiritual perfection. The seven eyes are suggestive of God's full oversight and protection. Removal of iniquity in one day portrays what would be accomplished on **the** day of complete atonement--the day

of Calvary. The wonderful provisions made possible by Calvary would allow each rich recipient to invite others into this sphere of spiritual protection. This is the great message God gives His people by means of the cleansed and reinstated priesthood. It is a strikingly beautiful Messianic prophecy.

The Candlestick And The Olive Trees (4:1-14)

vv. 1-3: Here we have the fifth vision vouchsafed the prophet. The communicating Angel awakened the prophet, who perhaps had fallen again into the sleep of exhaustion. “Again” would imply that this was not the first time. We are reminded of the three apostles in exhausted sleep at the transfiguration scene in Matthew 17. The Angel inquired of the prophet what he saw. The golden candlestick is described in some detail along with the two olive trees by its side.

vv. 4-7: Zechariah knew what he saw but did not know the meaning. Hence, the flow of conversation continued between the attending Angel and the baffled prophet. Zechariah humbly confesses his ignorance as touching what the vision signified or represented. It is a message of encouragement to be given the temple builder—Zerubbabel—who was facing great and mounting odds in the rebuilding of the edifice on Mount Moriah. The job will be completed not by human power and might but by the Spirit’s aid. The mountain before Zerubbabel seemingly signified all obstacles placed before the temple builder. Such shall be removed, much like an imposing mountain becomes an advantageous plain. Bringing forth the headstone signified successful completion of the building. Double mention of grace reflects the people’s deep awareness that God’s favor crowned their temple labors with success.

vv. 8-10: Zechariah is given the fullest of assurance that Zerubbabel had begun the temple in its foundational stages and he would succeed in its finished stage. The temple construction had begun with the assessment made that this current building is nothing compared with its predecessor on this site. Jehovah warns them not to despise the day of small things. A day of rejoicing will transpire. Zerubbabel will finish the task. It all will enjoy God's approval and His blessings of protection and oversight.

vv. 11-14: One final question remains. Zechariah desires to know the meaning of the two olive trees. The Angel seems a bit surprised that Zechariah is not in the know on this point. The prophet confesses his inadequacy of knowledge relative to their meaning. The Angel says, "There are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Since Joshua as high priest figured prominently in the previous vision and Zerubbabel as governor and temple builder figures prominently in this vision, they likely would be the anointed ones. However, it should be kept firmly fixed in mind that they served as types or shadows of Him Who, when He came, would be anointed as priest and king as well as that of prophet—the Messiah. Meeting and merging into Him would be what Zechariah (prophet), Joshua (high priest) and Zerubbabel (ruler) all were accomplishing under the Mosaic system.

The Flying Roll (5:1-4)

vv. 1-4: The sixth vision vouchsafed the young prophet was of a flying roll. Books, as we currently know them, were unknown to the ancients. Their writing was done on long strips of leather, skin, or parchment and rolled between two sticks. The material was rolled from one stick to another as the reader progressed. This roll was twenty cubits by ten cubits. In our measurement this would be thirty feet by fifteen feet. Evidently, there was writing on

both sides. Contained were the curses of those who had wronged man by thefts and those who had wronged God by misuse of the Lord's name. These two sins may have included all wrongs the evildoers had done their fellow men and their holy God on high. Punishment meted out to such would be swift and severe. The Lord is to be the sure executor of such. In modern parlance we would say, "The chickens have come home to roost." The punishment would be permanent.

The Woman In The Midst Of the Ephah (5:5-11)

vv. 5-7: The communicating Angel challenged the prophet to lift up his eyes and observe the seventh vision. Unsure what it was, the prophet inquired of the communicating or interpreting Angel. The Angel informed Zechariah that it was an ephah. This was a Hebrew measurement. Commentators vary widely in its exact equivalent, some saying about five gallons or twenty quarts, and some as high as eight gallons or forty quarts. Instead of an exact measurement, it probably refers to a basket, barrel, or container that would hold that much or more and in which a woman could be placed. This represented the wickedness of the people. In the basket was a woman. She was covered by a talent of lead. This probably served as a covering or the lid of the container. It was lifted up to enable the prophet to see the enclosed woman.

vv. 8-11: The woman in the vessel personified the wickedness of the people. Earlier prophets such as Isaiah had used wicked women to represent the enormous iniquity of the people. It appears that, as soon as the covering or lid had been lifted for the prophet's viewing, the lid was closed again. Coming next into the purview of

the prophet were two other women. They were not confined in the vessel as was the first woman. They were drawn into the vision with another purpose in mind. The record is silent as touching whether they were good women or evil women. They were God's chosen instruments. They possessed wings and there was sufficiency of wind in their wings enabling them to lift up the container between heaven and earth, bearing it away. Zechariah desired to know the destination of the removing vessel. He was informed by the communicating Angel that the destination was Shinar. There an abode for it would be built. Shinar is where Nimrod had begun his kingdom of rebellion in earlier times (Gen. 10:11-12). Shinar represented the realm of rebellion. The thought seemingly is that God is removing wickedness and rebellion from His land to Satan's realm, where it properly belongs. Hailey well states, "Wickedness must be completely removed from God's kingdom and His people, and the complete separateness must be maintained throughout time."¹

The Four Chariots And Variously Colored Horses (6:1-8)

vv. 1-8: This is the eighth and final vision vouchsafed Zechariah. The four chariots came from between the two mountains. Some have thought two of four hills on which Jerusalem rested may have been in the vision, but there may not be any precise geographical area intended at all. They may simply represent drapery in the vision, suggestive of elevations. The chariots were drawn by red, black, white, and grisled and bay horses, respectively. Older commentators thought they represented the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires much as did the metallic image in Daniel 2. Since verse five tells us that these are the four spirits that go forth from Jehovah,

they may simply represent forces He sends in the administration of His government upon earth. He still rules in the kingdoms of men, as Daniel sought to impress upon Babylonian leadership. Red often represents war and bloodshed; black frequently symbolizes famine and economic times of difficulty; white reflected festivity and victory; bay or grisled represented the power essential in accomplishing desired tasks. Their mission is to the north, the south, and to and fro throughout the earth. The message is given that God's purpose, especially in the north country, has been accomplished.

The Branch And The New Temple To Be Built (6:9-15)

vv. 9-11: Jehovah's Word again comes to Zechariah. Instructions are given relative to the making of crowns which were to be placed upon the head of Joshua. He was the bonafide high priest. Some think one crown is for Joshua and another for Zerubbabel, but Zerubbabel is not in the picture, only Joshua.

vv. 12-13: Joshua was a type of Him Who was far greater—the Messiah. Note what is affirmed. (1) He is to be man. God will become man in the Incarnation. (2) He is the Branch. He would come from David's line. (3) He shall grow up out of his place—a reference to His being a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2) and as living among his own people. (4) He shall build the Lord's temple, i.e., the Lord's church (Matt. 16:18). (5) He shall bear the glory. Might, power, dominion, and majesty will be His. (6) He will be both king (ruler) and priest (the one atoning for man's sins) on His throne. This is a death knell to premillennialism, for He is priest on His throne. They have His throne on earth in the millennium. Yet Hebrews 8:4 says He cannot be priest on earth. Jeremiah 22:30 says He could not prosper were His throne in Judah. (7) The counsel of peace

is made possible by His being both priest and king. There is no real peace unless He is both priest and king and is **now** on His throne, which He definitely is.

vv. 14-15: Crowns are mentioned in connection with Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen. These will become memorials in the temple. Those afar off evidently refer to Gentiles who would come under the auspices of Him Who is king and priest on His throne. They will ally themselves with Him in the great Messianic kingdom. Obedience is the key to bringing it all into faithful fruition. This would be the way for Gentiles to be blessed under the priestly and kingly rule of the Branch, the great temple builder of a spiritual edifice.

Matters Of Fasting

vv. 1-3: Zechariah is more time-conscious than most of the other prophets. He dates this message as being in Darius' fourth year (518 B.C.) and in the ninth month and fourth day (November/December). Sherezer and Regemmelech led a group to Jerusalem to pray and to inquire of priests and prophets about continuing in a fifth-month fast. This they had done on their own for many years. Mosaic Law only demanded one annual fast day, and that was the Day of Atonement, which was the seventh month and tenth day (September/October).

vv. 4-7: Zechariah answers in behalf of God and addresses it to all the people—not just the delegation. They had inquired only of the fifth-month fast. Jehovah added the seventh to the query and inquired if they fasted for Him or for themselves. Clearly, it was for the latter. When the fasts were over and they returned to their regular diets, did they do this for God or themselves? The latter is surely the implied answer. Jehovah inquires as to why they have not heard and heeded what had been spoken by their earlier prophets when Jerusalem and the whole land

enjoyed prosperity? Were they not more interested in their humanly contrived fasts than what the prophets delivered—i.e., the Word of God?

vv. 8-10: They had been majoring in minors—humanly contrived fasts—and had ignored the weightier matters of law, justice, and mercy. Such is reminiscent of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. Here is that in which the Lord would have them to major with diligence: (1) execute true judgment (major in dispensing justice); (2) exhibit mercy and compassion to brethren (manifest brotherly kindness); (3) practice no oppression to widow, fatherless, stranger, or poor (never mistreat or ignore their very obvious needs); (4) plot no evil in your hearts against your brethren (be free of any wrath and malice in attitude and actions as well).

vv. 11-12: They met such with rebellious dispositions. They “pulled away the shoulder.” We would say they gave such “the cold shoulder.” How very many of our everyday expressions are Biblically based! They plugged up their ears from further hearing. With deliberate wickedness they made their hearts harder than an adamant stone (possible reference to a diamond). They refused to listen to Mosaic Law or prophetic pronouncements. The Lord visited such with His wrath.

vv. 13-14: As they sowed, so they reaped. They refused to hear God when He cried; He then refused to hear them when they cried. God scattered them with the whirlwind of his wrath and left their land desolate.

Jehovah’s Encouragement Relative To Their Future (8:1-23)

vv. 1-3: Some fifteen times, by my count, we have Zechariah attributing the source of his message to God in just this chapter alone. Jehovah had been jealous for Zion.

He could brook no rivals. He could not allow them to be minus discipline when they sinned. His fury had been visited upon them. Now, in mercy, He had returned to Zion and great blessings were in store for His people. Verse three, it appears to me, has definite Messianic overtures. Jerusalem, as a city of truth, and the mountain as possessive of holiness, fit spiritual Zion (the church) much more accurately. When was physical Jerusalem ever really a city of truth and a mountain of holiness between 518 B.C., the date of this prophecy, and A.D. 70, when Rome destroyed the long rebellious city on four hills in Judah?

vv. 4-8: These verses find their long-ranged and beautiful fulfillment in Messianic times. Such will be a time of spiritual longevity, happiness, and security. God viewed such marvelously, and so will His people. People will be saved from the east and west and enjoy the great, glorious, and golden blessings of spiritual Zion. Jesus spoke of Gospel subjects from the east and west saved by Christianity and, ultimately, in heaven, sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the eternal kingdom of heavenly glory (Matt. 8:11). God envisions a people who are His, and He is their God. He envisions a people who will serve Him in truth and righteousness. This better fits the Gospel Age than the five centuries between Zechariah and the Christian Age.

vv. 9-15: Words of encouragement are given in this section to the building of the temple, then under construction and soon to be completed. There is an allusion to the period in its past constructive stages, in which they were lethargic in their labors and as such were not blessed by God. Haggai alludes to the period in which their wages were put in a bag, as it were, and the bag was filled with holes. God promises now to bless them. There had been a period in which He had severely disciplined them, but now

He planned to do well toward them. His doing well toward Jerusalem would take on far deeper and richer measures under the Messiah.

vv. 16-17: God prescribes two positives for them—speak truth with neighbors and execute truth and peace in all your relationships. Following are two needed negatives—plan no evil in heart against neighbors and practice no false oaths. Verse seventeen is reminiscent of the seven things God hates or abominates in Proverbs 6:16-19.

vv. 18-23: The prophet again delivers God's message. He returns to the question of fasting raised in chapter seven. Their various fasts were going to be replaced by seasons of gladness and festive feasts of joy and happiness. They could surely help produce such by becoming and remaining lovers of truth and peace. Mention is made of large ingatherings of people, with spirituality as their intense impetus in life. They will be a people of prayer. They will encourage others to seek the Lord. Again this last section of the chapter better fits spiritual Zion with its evangelistic thrust and sincere interest in others than merely physical Jerusalem. Hailey remarks in his final comments on verse twenty-three, "The seeking after the Lord by the people of all nations found its complete fulfillment in Christ."²

Zechariah is never far removed from the Messianic consciousness that preciously permeates his powerful, prophetic product.

The Coming Of The Meek And Just King (9:1-17)

vv. 1-4: "Burden" refers to the prophetic proclamation of coming judgment upon nations and individuals who have sinned grievously against heaven's Majestic, holy God on high. Syria will feel such. Phoenician cities of great commercial prestige and power will feel such. Zidon was

the older of the two Phoenician cities on the mighty Mediterranean Sea. Tyre became far more prestigious and built for herself an impregnable island just off the mainland out in the Mediterranean. She was attacked and defeated by the mighty Macedonian, Alexander the Great, a long time subsequent to Zechariah's penning this burden. Alexander left her a smitten city in fiery destruction.

vv. 5-8: The Grecian power of the Macedonian conqueror would bring humiliating defeat to the proud cities along the Philistine Mediterranean coastline. Idolatry, once the blight of the Philistine cities, is going to be removed. Their turning to God seemingly referred to Messianic times. Be it recalled that Philip the evangelist preached up and down this coastal area of cities just subsequent to the eunuch's conversion and prior to his arrival at Caesarea (Acts 8:40).

vv. 9-11: Here is one of the clearest of the Messianic prophecies in Zechariah. It is of the Messianic King Who is just, Who saves, Who is lowly, and Who rides into Zion (Jerusalem) on the lowly ass or colt. Fulfillment of this is observed in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; and Luke 19:28-40. The Messiah does not conquer by carnal means but by spiritual forces. He brings real peace. Vast indeed will be the outreaches of the Messianic King. Blood of covenant in verse eleven may well refer to Calvary. It is by this powerful prescription that all prisoners in the waterless pits of sin and corruption can know pardon from such.

vv. 12-17: Jehovah is going to bless the returnees who have recently come home from the Chaldean exile. Their eyes are to be riveted on Him Who is their real stronghold—the coming Messiah. Blessings of prosperity and security are to be theirs. Jehovah's protection will surround them. Salvation will be their proffered blessing. Verse seventeen seems to be a Messianic pointer depicting

the greatness of His goodness and beauty. His is a spiritual beauty. The corn and new wine (not intoxicative) richly suggest the blessing enjoyed under the Mighty Messiah, the Beautiful Benefactor.

Jehovah's Interest In His People (10:1-12)

vv. 1-4: The latter rains came in the spring and aided greatly in bringing their winter grain crops of wheat, barley, etc., toward harvest fruition. The refreshing showers, the bright clouds, and the luxuriant grass all reflect great blessings from Jehovah. Vain idols and lying diviners are capable of bringing no worthwhile blessings to humanity. Those who should have been the selfless and serving shepherds of God's people had displeased Him with their shiftless form of leadership. Proper punishment was forthcoming. Verse four seemingly has all sorts of Messianic overtures with the corner (cornerstone which He became), the nail (upon which all rests), the battle bow (the means of all victory), and every ruler deriving reigning power from Him. Be it recalled that the Messiah would be possessive of all authority in heaven and earth.

vv. 5-8: Jehovah's people are portrayed here as an army engaged in successful conflict. They are mighty men; they fight with valor; the Lord is their leader; their enemies are confounded and confused. Judah and Joseph are spoken as united in this conflict. God strengthens them and saves them. In the marvels of His mercy, He treats them as though they had never been cast off. The Lord is their God. His ear is open to their entreaties. They shall know the sure joys of valiant victory. God will hiss or call for them, and they shall be gathered to Him. Redemption is theirs, and a spiritual increase characterizes them. What Israel achieved or attained under the Maccabean period during intertestament times may partly be covered in this context; but to see that only in these verses is far too limited in my

judgment. Messianic blessings are in the forefront here, as well as in the remnant of this chapter. Hailey well sums up this view by writing:

However, for the ultimate and complete fulfillment of the prophecy one must look to the Messianic age when Judah and Ephraim were joined together in a spiritual union, fighting a spiritual warfare.³

The Maccabean struggle was more in the carnal, though fought for the preservation of God's physical people.

vv. 9-12: Messianic times are still discussed. Reflected here are the planting and gathering together of people in Christ. From far and near such people will come. Egypt and Assyria had been synonyms for the slavery God's people once experienced by these pagan powers. Gilead and Lebanon could refer to the realm of spiritual freedom when called forth from the sphere of slavery to sin. The place will be too straightened for them. This reflects the great increase they would experience. Verse eleven assures them of God's full help in all afflictions and tribulations. Their former enemies are no more. They will be strengthened in the Lord. Walking up and down in His name refers to the full strength He imparts. Jehovah's name stands for all that He is, just as the name Jesus Christ stands for all that He is.

One who sees no Messianic pointers in this chapter has read it far too superficially.

The Messiah To Be Sold For Thirty Pieces Of Silver (11:1-17)

It seems best to approach this chapter as the destruction and devastation wrought on Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Zechariah was not describing Zion's fall to Nebuchadnezzar that occurred many decades before he became God's selected seer.

vv. 1-2: The stately temple was partly composed of lordly cedars that came from Lebanon. The fall of such is herein depicted. Fir trees and oaks of Bashan are described as being destroyed. Every stunning syllable sets forth widespread devastation, and such was Zion's demise in A.D. 70.

vv. 3-9: Shepherds howl as they witness the passing of their glory. Roaring lions once could be heard among the thickets lining each side of the Jordan. The pride of the historic Jordan River is no more. Feeding the flock of slaughter refers to widespread destruction. There would be no mercy shown by the destroyers of the once-glorious city. Jehovah's pity has departed the apostate and rebellious city. Jerusalem was both when Rome laid siege to her in the late 60's of that first century. She was ripe for destruction. God would take care of true Israel but would destroy apostate, rebellious Israel. The three shepherds who were cut off were leaders who loathed God, and He abhorred their fleecing the sheep. Many interpretations have been given, but what three groups of supposed leaders did more destructive work in Palestine in the first century of Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians than scribes, elders and chief priests? Coffman says Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians are portrayed. The groups are the same—unholy, impious hirelings who supposedly were shepherds. Death, devastation, and destruction were theirs at the hands of ruthless Rome led by the determined Titus.

vv. 10-14: No longer did Judaism have a champion in God. He had removed them from being His people. Mosaic Law ended at Calvary. Christian Law began on Pentecost in Acts 2. Judaism was a corpse from A.D. 33 to A.D. 70, when God buried it once and for all time. Apostate Israel showed its true colors in appraising the value of God's Son at thirty pieces of silver. This was the price they paid Judas, the insensitive traitor. Later, the money bought

the potter's field in which strangers might be buried. Once and for all, God broke the back of abolished Judaism. Matthew quotes this passage about the silver pieces and the potter's field and attributes it to Jeremiah. Matthew's pen did not slip; his mind did not nod at this point. Zechariah's book probably was in a section of Hebrew Sacred Scripture headed by Jeremiah's book, and Matthew quoted the head book. Another possibility is that Jeremiah might have uttered this orally, Zechariah later wrote it, and Matthew referred to what Jeremiah actually **said**. There is no contradiction for a surety, modernism and its hostile, destructive critics to the contrary notwithstanding.

vv. 15-17: These verses paint a picture of the severity of punishment destined for the foolish shepherd who forsook the sheep and had neither interest in them nor any concern for their safety.

The Messiah To Be Pierced (12:1-14)

The thrust of this chapter is what God planned to do for true Israel or the Messiah's kingdom.

vv. 1-2: Israel here is spiritual Zion—not apostate, rebellious Judaism. God is powerful in being her patron and protector. He stretched forth the heavens; He laid the foundations of the earth. He formed man's spirit within him. He is Father of our spirits as per Hebrews 12:9. Life begins at conception, and that is when man possesses his spirit. This is just as true as that death occurs when body and spirit are severed (Jas. 2:26). God will protect His people. Man is not going to destroy that which Daniel said would be everlasting and that Paul said could not be moved or destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28).

vv. 3-5: "In that day" of verses three and four is a crystal-clear allusion to Messianic times. The church of Christ will be beset by formidable foes seeking her total destruction, but they shall never prevail against her. Vivid

promises are made in these verses of what God would do in protecting true Israel against her every foe. Spiritual rulership in God's church (her "governors," KJV, or "chieftains," ASV) shall sense with clear perception that their powers of preservation result from God. He is Lord of hosts, and this expression is full of power and might.

vv. 6-8: These verses do not portray raw, carnal, military power at work but spiritual power able to meet any foe, every foe, and come forth with victory. The church is priority personified to the Lord, and priority best describes the shield with which He surrounds the cause of His Son. Soldiers of Christ will be strong in battle, much like David before the bear, the lion, or Goliath, the Philistine giant, on a southern Palestinian battleground. The Angel of the Lord is the Second Person or Jehovah—Messiah. The Lamb and His army are invincible. Revelation says that as a bottom line.

vv. 9-14: "In the day" is Messianic in prophetic scope. Foes are going to be futile in seeking to destroy God's true Jerusalem. God's spirit of grace and supplications will be their rich legacy. Verse ten makes mention of the pierced Messiah or a reference to the means of His death—crucifixion. Though Christianity is a religion of vibrant joy and victorious outreach, yet mourning has a place. Jesus was a man of sorrows. We are to mourn what wicked men have done to Him and His cause. We are to mourn our own sins and how frequently we have failed to be a credit to Christ's cause. Each Lord's Day we solemnly and soberly reflect on what our Lord endured—the sorrow He bore, the debt He paid, the sacrifice He made, the love He exhibited, and the way to heaven which has been opened by the crimson blood shed on "the old rugged cross." All this mourning is expressed very vividly and graphically in this sobering and solemn section of Sacred Scripture.

The Cleansing Fountain And The Smitten Shepherd (13:1-9)

v. 1: “In that day” is a sure Messianic identification touching time. Zechariah 12:10 had introduced the Christ, Who was pierced (crucified). From the crucified Christ at Calvary there would be a fountain of spiritual cleansing opened for David’s house and Jerusalem’s inhabitants. Sin is missing the mark or veering from right; uncleanness refers to the polluting or defiling nature of transgression. In Christ and Christ only is there spiritual cleansing.

vv. 2-6: Idolatry will not be tolerated in spiritual Zion. Prophets will pass when their work of revealing and confirming the word finally results in the completed Bible. Unclean spirits which had been permitted during the time of Christ and the apostles will disappear. We have **no** demon possession of people today or expulsions of such, as occultism envisions and deceitfully practices. False prophets (teachers) will be in evidence, but even their parents will see through such and reject their false teaching. False teachers will be caught up with and made ashamed as their predictions fall to the ground void of any type of fulfillment. No longer will they even wear the garments worn by true prophets of old. They will be led to confess their false teaching and have to give account of the wounds they received while engaged in their deceptive devices.

vv. 7-9: Jehovah speaks here and portrays what will be done against the Shepherd-Messiah. Jehovah refers to him as “my fellow,” which means of the same essence as is the First Person. This forever refutes Jehovah’s Witnesses’ doctrine that seeks to reduce Christ to creature status or the first of Jehovah’s creations. Jesus, in Matthew 26:31, employs this passage to portray what was about to happen. When He, the Shepherd, was smitten, the sheep (apostles) were scattered. Yet His great work later would be in

gathering them and all the obedient ones into the church soon to be established. Not all would be saved, but a remnant would be. Those obedient ones who were willing to brave the fires of refinement in burning away the dross will be the Lord's people. They would say in gladsome gratitude, "The Lord is my God."

Jerusalem's Destruction And Messianic Times Depicted (14:1-21)

vv. 1-3: The prophet is not describing Jerusalem's destruction at Chaldean hands, which was past history by several decades. He is not describing Jerusalem's destruction when Christ comes, for all earth is destined for destruction then. At time's end houses will not be robbed, women will not be raped, and people will not be hauled away into slavery. Zechariah is depicting Jerusalem's fall at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70, when all these things transpired. Rome was the Lord's agent of vengeance upon the rebellious, apostate city.

vv. 4-11: These verses do not refer to some future time in which the Messiah will set actual foot upon Mount Olivet. Instead it refers to the Romans who waged their relentless siege of the city from this named mount. In the siege the Romans temporarily lifted the battle. This allowed time for all Christians to vacate the city which they did just as the Lord instructed in the great Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24. Messianic blessings are depicted. Living waters reflect those blessings. They will be widespread. They will not be seasonable. The Lord's dominion will be a vast one. Geographical references emphasize how widespread Messianic blessings will be.

vv. 12-15: These verses are highly figurative. They set forth graphically the foes that shall assail the cause of King Messiah. Though the enemies will be strong,

determined, and well-entrenched, yet they shall not be victorious in the end. They are fighting a losing battle.

vv. 16-19: With strong Hebrew flavor, Messianic worship and service is depicted in these verses. There will be festive joy reminiscent of the Feast of Tabernacles each fall.

vv. 20-21: These concluding verses depict the full consecration in evidence during these glorious times of the Messiah.

Twelve Lessons Learned From Zechariah

1. There was no generation gap between youthful Zechariah and the aged Haggai in working for the Lord.
2. Zechariah remembered God in youth, reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 12:1.
3. Zechariah was a ready channel through whom the Lord could work.
4. Zechariah had profound respect for God's temple, which he helped inspire the people to complete.
5. Zechariah prophesied much of a far greater temple destined to come in later centuries—the Lord's church.
6. Were he alive today he would stand amazed at countless church members who hold the church in antipathy and apathy.
7. Zechariah had profound respect for the inspiration of God's Word. Some eighty-four times he attributed his message to the Lord.
8. Zechariah was fervently faithful at his post of prophetic duty.
9. Zechariah and his book prove conclusively that there is such a thing as predictive prophecy.
10. Zechariah had a tremendous hunger and thirst to know all he could about the visions vouchsafed him and the prophetic predictions he gave.

11. Zechariah never tampered with God's Word but delivered it faithfully and completely as it came to him. In this he was like Paul would later be (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3).
12. Zechariah was both a foreteller (messenger for his own time) and a forthteller (a message greatly ahead of his time and which later would be fulfilled minutely, precisely).

Conclusion

Rich and regal has been our contemplation of Zechariah the man and Zechariah the book.

Endnotes

1 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary On The Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 346-347.

2 Ibid, p. 365.

3 Ibid, p. 377.

CHAPTER 34

Great Lessons From The Book Of Zechariah

Kenneth L. Jones

Introduction

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH contains some very interesting and significant homiletical material, but sermons drawn from any text should reflect a knowledge of the historical background and basic message of that portion of the Scriptures. The approach to be taken in this work, therefore, will consist of a brief statement of the contents of Zechariah along with some suggestions for sermons.

Historical Background And Brief Outline

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the Jews had returned to their homeland with instructions to rebuild the temple. The foundation was laid, but there the work seems to have stopped. Sixteen years later Haggai and Zechariah are sent to stir up the people to complete the work. Haggai was an old man, perhaps eighty-one years of age, but Zechariah was a young man. This may be deduced from the fact that he was a grandson of Iddo who was listed in the first group of captives returning to Jerusalem. Their preaching was successful, and in four years the temple was completed and worship restored.

The first six chapters consist of eight visions calculated to inspire the Israelites to complete the

rebuilding of the temple. Chapters seven and eight record an incident which occurred when the work was about half-completed. A delegation came and asked Zechariah if they should weep in the fifth month. They had been doing so since Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in the fifth month of 586 B.C. No answer was given. The delegation was reminded that fasting, in itself, is an indifferent thing but must be estimated by those who observe it. He also explained why the Jews had been exiled and the reason for their present predicament. Chapters nine through fourteen, delivered fifty years later when Zechariah was an old man, are mostly Messianic. They encourage the Jews but do so by pointing to Christ.

Some much-needed sermons are suggested from the circumstances surrounding the writing of this book. First, God's people today often need to be reminded of their duties and goals and exhorted to diligence (2 Pet. 1:12). Second, God can use both old and young to accomplish His work. Haggai was an old man, whereas Zechariah was a young man. They worked together with great success. The church desperately needs both the vigor and enthusiasm of youth and the wisdom and experience of age. The ideal congregation has a balance of young and old and wisely employs those of all ages in roles suitable to their strengths and weaknesses. Third, God used Zechariah as a young man; he also used him when he was old. The prophet did a great work in his youth, and the prophecies of his old age are among the most remarkable foreglimpses of Christ. Many congregations today are guilty of a most grievous mistake and injustice in robbing the flock of the valuable assets of older preachers. Fourth, all of God's spokesmen need to be encouragers. This sometimes requires rebuke for sins, the exposure of error, and reminding of the "thou shalt nots" of God's Word, but the overall aim should be

constructive. Defective buildings must sometimes be torn down but for the purpose of constructing a sounder and more beautiful edifice.

The Eight Visions Of Chapters One Through Six

The visions of this section were given as an encouragement to the Israelites to build the temple. They may be used as a group or individually as an introduction to sermons on the subject of building. There are many things which people need to be building today: strong congregations, strong scriptural marriages and homes, Christian character, good friendships which will be helpful in the salvation of souls.

The first vision, the horsemen in the myrtle grove (Zech. 1:7-17), declares that Jerusalem will once again be a great and prosperous city. The myrtle grove represents peace: "all the world sitteth still and is at rest." The nations God used to punish Israel were at rest in a false security. The bottom signifies low estate. The rider on the red horse is the angel of Jehovah. The red horse symbolizes power. The horsemen are they whom the Lord sent. Three score and ten years means that the predicted seventy years of captivity had passed. The prophet was to publish two things: (1) God's care for His people, however humiliated, and (2) the promise of coming prosperity. The line stretched meant that the city and the temple would be built. A lesson on the urgency of building may be taken from this text. Now is the time to build. God has promised to be with His children as they carry out the great commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

The basic message of the second vision, the four horns and the four craftsmen (Zech. 1:18-21), is that Judah's enemies would be destroyed and she would again be exalted. The horns represent the powers hostile to Israel.

Four signifies completeness, the four winds from which they came. Four smiths (craftsmen) were human agencies God would use to overthrow Judah's enemies. A good lesson from this vision is the ultimate victory of Christ and His church over all enemies of the faith.

The third vision, the measuring line (2:1-13), signifies construction. When the temple was rebuilt, God would re-people and protect Jerusalem. The measuring line insures that the temple would be rebuilt. God's promise to dwell in and protect Zion may have its ultimate fulfillment in spiritual Jerusalem (the church). This would be an excellent text to introduce a lesson on the church that Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18).

The fourth vision, Joshua, the high priest, before the angel (Zech. 3:1-10), is a pre-vision of the coming of Christ. Filthy garments represent the sins of Joshua and the people. Satan is the prosecuting attorney. Joshua, a type of Christ, provided temporary cleansing, but Christ the permanent cleansing. Christ is the branch, God's servant. A lesson concerning the priesthood of Christ and the cleansing from sin accomplished through His perfect sacrifice is naturally derived from this text. All have sinned and are in need of this great salvation.

The fifth vision is the golden candlestick and the two olive trees (4:1-14). The function of the candlestick and the lamps is to give light. The two olive trees which supply the lamps with oil are Joshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor. Zerubbabel is encouraged to get the work done. The light in the temple will burn until Messiah comes. Christ will be both prince and priest.

In the sixth vision, the flying roll (5:1-4) is the Word of God, by which man is to measure himself. A curse is to come upon those who steal and swear falsely. When the temple is built and the Law preached, the people shall be

purified. People today are purified in obeying the Truth (1 Pet. 1:22). God's Word is the standard by which all must examine themselves (2 Cor. 13:5).

The woman in the ephah in vision seven (Zech. 5:5-11) represents wickedness. Once the temple is built, that great measure of sin shall be removed from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was to happen soon.

The eighth vision, the four chariots (6:1-8), is an expansion of vision one and signifies the destruction of Israel's enemies. The four chariots were war chariots representing God's judgments upon sinners of the world. Red symbolizes bloodshed; black, sorrow and mourning; grey, swiftness; white, victory. The black horse indicates the approaching doom of Babylon. The grey (grisled) horse going toward the south country symbolizes war and pestilence in Edom, Egypt, and Ethiopia. The red horse symbolizes bloodshed and pestilence. Babylon was destroyed in 515 B.C., the same year the temple was completed. The north country is Babylon.

The crowning of Joshua (6:9-15) is symbolic of the crowning of Christ. Christ is the branch and is both king and priest.

Shall We Weep In The Fifth Month?

Chapters seven and eight deal with a question about fasting. The Jews had been observing a fast in the fifth month, mourning the destruction of the temple. Now that they were about to have a new temple, the question arose as to whether this custom should be continued. Zechariah reminded them that sins and disobedience had caused the destruction of the temple, their captivity and present affliction, and that, therefore, there was good reason for fasting and mourning. But their fasting had become a mere outward pretense, and their feasts were for their own pleasure. There is no genuine mourning and penitence for

sins on the part of many today. This Scripture also suggests a timely lesson concerning hypocrisy and those today who go through a mere outward form of worship or service of any kind, and only for their own convenience and profit.

Chapter eight contains the promise that the present condition would not continue always. The Lord would show His love for His people and fill Jerusalem with happy people. He would thenceforth bestow His blessings if they would obey. The fasts would be turned into joy and gladness, inhabitants from many cities would pursue God's favor, and many nations would seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem. This picture of a peaceful and prosperous Zion finds its ultimate fulfillment in spiritual Zion, the church. A lesson on the spiritual blessings found only in Christ, in His body, the church, and of the true peace and happiness of the Christian life could be introduced from this passage. Another lesson is that sinners do not have to continue in their lost and undone condition. If they will only repent and obey God, He will forgive and bestow His promised blessings.

The Coming Of Zion's King

Chapters nine through eleven contain the prophet's burden against the nations. The neighboring nations shall be destroyed, while Israel shall dwell in safety and independence. All the cities mentioned in this chapter were devastated by Alexander the Great, while Jerusalem was preserved. Then would occur the coming of the Messiah. The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is foretold in verse nine. The weapons of war were to be cast off and salvation offered. The peaceful nature of Christ's kingdom, the church, was described, and also His world-wide dominion. In verses eleven through seventeen of chapter nine is an assurance that Jehovah would protect Israel against evil shepherds. The warfare of this passage is

spiritual but described against the background of Israel's struggle with Greece. There is reference to the blood of the covenant in verse eleven. Jehovah prepares to do battle with Judah as the bow and Ephraim as the arrow. The sons of Greece are to be stirred up by the preaching of the Gospel.

In chapter ten Jehovah lifts the spirit of the Jews by proclaiming an era of spiritual prosperity. They must ask for prosperity, and their obedience is contemplated. Furthermore, they must ask of Jehovah, not of idols or teraphim. Their depression was due to unfaithfulness; they had listened to the false shepherds. The shepherds are faithless priests, prophets, and scribes. The he-goats are the rich oppressors, and the good horse is Judah until the Christ comes. Christ is presented in verse four as the battlebow and the nail. He bore the burden alone. The place to which He will bring them back is the church. They of Ephraim are the Samaritans, and those in far countries are the Gentiles. Jesus will lead them out of bondage of sin and into the church. Egypt and Assyria signify bondage. Gilead and Lebanon symbolize prosperity and peace. The only place adequate to hold all these people is spiritual Israel, the church (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-9).

Chapter eleven depicts the Jews' rejection of the true Shepherd, and their consequent desolation. The prosperity foretold in the previous chapter cannot restore the rank and file because of sin. Zechariah is told to feed the **flock of slaughter**. They had not realized their sins and would be delivered into the hands of their neighbors, the Romans. In feeding the flock, Zechariah is a type of Christ, projecting what would come to pass later. The poor are the humble and obedient. The two staves are the manifold care of God. Beauty represents graciousness, and Bands represents unity. One month signifies prompt action. The three shepherds are, perhaps, the scribes, Pharisees, and

Sadducees; that which **dieth** pictures battle; those cut off, their rejection by God; and **eating flesh**, starvation. Because they reject Him, Christ will not feed them and will give them up. This is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. The crucifixion of Jesus is foretold in verses ten through fourteen. The Jews broke His covenant. They broke His staff, **beauty**, but the poor gave heed. The thirty pieces of silver cast into the potter in the house of Jehovah refers to Judas' casting the **thirty pieces of silver** down before the Jewish rulers, with which they purchased the potters' field. When the bands were broken, there was nothing to hold them together, and the Jews were to be given over to the foolish shepherd, who would destroy them. The foolish shepherd is Rome, and the worthless shepherd Jewish leaders or any other than Christ, the True Shepherd.

Chapters twelve through fourteen contain the prophet's burden (oracle) against Israel. The Israel under consideration in these chapters is spiritual Israel, the church. This section is calculated to be a message of hope.

Verses one and two affirm the certainty of God and declare that Jerusalem is to be destroyed because the Jews murdered the Good Shepherd. In verses three through nine, the remnant is to stagger the power of Rome by the preaching of the Gospel. Verses ten through fourteen picture forgiveness in the church. A prediction of the pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2) and the piercing of Jesus' side are pictured in these verses.

Verses one through six of chapter thirteen foretell an opened fountain in the Christian Age—the blood of Christ in baptism. The names of idols are to be **cut off**. The land is Palestine; and the prophets are the false prophets, for there were no true prophets at this time and had not been for some four hundred years. The evil spirit or unclean spirit may refer to idolatry. The verses describe

an attitude or condition which would prevail in that day. The bondman of verse five is Christ. He will assert that He is not a false prophet. The reference to Him as a bondman and tiller signify His lowly position while on earth. His wounds between the arms received in the house of His friends is a prophecy concerning Judas (Psm. 41:9). Verses seven through nine describe the death of the shepherd and scattering of the sheep. Christ had to die; this was the Father's will. The little ones to whom Jehovah would turn His hand in help when Jerusalem would be destroyed are the disciples, who, according to Josephus, escaped to Pella. God's providential care is described in verse nine.

Chapter fourteen, the first two verses, contain a prophecy of Israel's punishment for rebellion and unfaithfulness. Verses three through eight predict that God in turn would fight for spiritual Israel and destroy Roman power. The armies would gather at Mt. Olives. Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives and the mountain cleaving signifies the way of escape for the disciples. Smoke and fire picture the destruction of Jerusalem. **The living water** going forth from Jerusalem describes the spread of the Gospel. Verses nine through twenty-one are a description of the growth of the church. These verses also teach the necessity of faithful attendance to the worship, of the indispensability of the church, and that there is to be no distinction as to class or race.

Conclusion

The Book of Zechariah is rich in sermon material. There are lessons to be derived from the background of the restoration of the Jews to their homeland, of the rebuilding of the temple, of Israel's condition at the time of Zechariah's ministry, and the promises of more prosperous days in the future. In addition, there are the

many specific prophecies of Christ. Among these are (1) His atoning death for the removal of sin, (2) that He would be the builder of God's house, (3) His universal reign as both priest and king, (4) His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, (5) His betrayal by a friend (Judas), (6) His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, and (7) the piercing of His side and hands. All of these are excellent texts for sermons as one preaches Christ today. These prophecies, given hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, prove His identity as God's Son and also the inspiration of the Bible.

CHAPTER 35

Introduction To The Book Of Malachi

Foy L. Smith

Introduction

WE STUDY AND TEACH and preach so much from the major prophets, I sometimes fear that we forget the powerful impact the minor prophets have upon religion in past and present days. Malachi was the last of the minor prophets. If we believe that “major” means that the major prophets did a more important work than the minor prophets, we are mistaken. It would be hard to find more important teaching than that which is found in the last twelve books of the Old Testament. Scholars believe that Malachi continued with some of the teachings of Nehemiah and Zechariah. These prophets rebuked apostasy and called upon the people to return to the Lord and His ways. How can teaching like this be classified as not being important in any age? Only the good Lord knows how badly we need this kind of teaching today. It is believed that the date of the book was about the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 424 B.C. The name “Malachi” means “angel, messenger.” Some scholars suggest that Malachi may have been Ezra, some think Mordecai. But this is not probable, though it does show the kind of company he kept as a teacher. He was of the tribe of Zebulun. He died young, from the accounts we have. Haggai and Zechariah were

sent to reprove the people for not building the temple. Malachi was sent to rebuke them for their neglect of it. History has strange ways of repeating itself. The Lord's church went into apostasy in the first century. It "lay in waste" for hundreds of years. Pioneer preachers, at great sacrifices, restored it. Now, in its restored state, there are millions who neglect it while claiming to be its friends. It is sad that our Lord is still "wounded in the house of his friends" (Zech. 13:6). The people had not changed from Zechariah's time. They were still committing the same sins. People do not change much from one age to another. And this is why so much of the trouble they had then we still, at least in attitude, have now. Throughout all these ages, man has still not learned that he cannot "reply against God" (Rom. 9:20). Paul says in plain language that it is foolish to argue with God.

The Message Of Malachi

When we try to learn about Malachi in the works of other writers, both early writers and up-to-date writers, we come up sorely lacking. What we learn about his temperament and his loyalty to God's truth, we learn from the book he penned. A brief statement here and there in his book reveals his conviction and absolute loyalty to God. The statement is often true that a person can be classified quite accurately by his writings. "I would know your articles anywhere," I am often told as I travel around. People have read so much from my pen, which I trust has been worth reading in the main, that they know my style and how I speak through my pen. This comparison goes only so far, for I certainly am not in the class with Malachi—maybe in this one respect somewhat, but that has its limitations. Malachi spoke right to the point, and he did not evade issues that were either popular or unpopular. A preacher "tried out" for a church position a

good many years ago. The elders asked him what he preached on the issues that were very controversial in our brotherhood at that time. His reply was, "I'll preach whatever you want me to on those matters." He was no Malachi. Some commentators say that Malachi spoke more clearly of the Messiah than any other prophet. I would say that no person could speak more clearly of the coming Messiah than Isaiah (Isa. 53), or David (Psm. 22), but this is a compliment to the direction of Malachi's inspired pen when he wrote of our Lord's coming the first time. He also wrote of the Day of our Lord and judgment of the wicked. His book directed the people to keep the Law of Moses while they looked forward to the coming of Christ.

Maybe an apology is due the one who is to discuss the book of Malachi, for we are bound to overlap somewhat. However, he has an entire book to write and preach about; an introduction, especially on this prophet, certainly has its limitations, since so little is known about the man himself. He had, among other distinctions, the privilege of writing the last book in the Old Testament. He could easily emphasize some of the teachings of other prophets, especially so since he had the inspiration of the Spirit to guide him as the Spirit guided them (2 Pet. 1:21). It is not hard to write or preach orally when a perfect source of power is behind every line and every word uttered. Even critics have said that his book has an element of grace and power, that it also has great literary value.

The book of Malachi speaks of great reforms then needed and that spiritual worship is one absolute essential of true religion. It seems from all this that this prophet came along at just the right time, but isn't that always true? Has not God always sent faithful proclaimers of His Holy Word when they were most needed? We in this modern day have lost some great men and we will continue to see them leave this old world behind and go on into

that land beautiful beyond description. We wonder how we can get along without them and then another comes along to fill the gap. It must be this way or the Lord's cause could very well die in one generation or less.

Malachi had to be a person who was unusually calm under stress, for he was one who could denounce, threaten, and rebuke when necessary. And with such wayward ones, as God's people so often were, these chastisements were almost the order of the day, it seems. His book would not qualify as being one to promote good human feelings in view of what so many say our teaching should be like today. Today it is "get along regardless. Don't cross anyone—be a Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale type of proclaimer. Just talk about good things and never be negative." Now this might be all right if it worked, but such philosophies just do not work in today's society. Nor did they work in other societies, even the very ancient ones. A preacher said a few years ago, "There were no negative commands until the ten commandments were given." How wrong he was, and an older brother took him under his wing and tried to teach him better. He showed him that man received his first negative in the garden of Eden, when God said Adam and Eve should not eat of a certain tree "lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3). The Bible has thousands upon thousands of "thou shalt not" commands. Man would do well to respect every one that applies to him "lest he die!"

Malachi was a preacher who told the people they would prove their repentance by doing the good works of God. That repentance was to be followed by a change of attitude resulting in a change of actions. This is the kind of book that Malachi authored. When we meet people and know beforehand that great decisions must be reached, it helps if we know what kind of people they are before we meet them. When we study the book of Malachi, it is good to know something about its author. In other words, we

need an introduction to that person. An introduction to the book of Malachi means that we have some idea about what to expect before we get into the book itself. We need an introduction to its author. And in our case before us, about all we can learn about him is what we learn about his style of writing and the contents of his message. McCurdy, a scholar who lived many years ago, said this about Malachi's book: "Perhaps no prophecy gives in equal space so full a presentation of contemporary morals and religious life."

In this book, Malachi emphasized the love of Jehovah for Israel, the Fatherhood of God, His ideals and His laws for priests and common people. It seems that the priests had become indifferent to the services of the temple. This could not be allowed since everything revolved around the temple and temple services. For the rest of this manuscript, which will be followed by my sermon in due time, let me point out by way of introduction what we are to expect when we study Malachi. I shall purposely stay away from the text itself, lest I infringe too much on the territory of the speaker who deals directly with the text itself. What about the writing and preaching of Malachi?

One, his writings have a genuine prophetic spirit. When he spoke he had inspiration behind every syllable. He "breathed the breath of God" when he spoke. When inspiration was upon him, his speech was infallible. How different it is with today's modern prophets! There were false prophets even in the days when the Son of God graced this earth in person: "Thou hast tried them which say they are prophets, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:2). How deceitful the so-called TV evangelists are today! They have the same line. It goes like this: "I am receiving a word of knowledge...so-and-so has a kidney ailment...someone is being treated for cancer!" and on and on they go. The bottom line is, "How much money can you

send me and right now?” Only it is not in the form of a question. It is a demand! When Malachi prophesied he spoke the truth. And he did not prey upon the gullible. And he did not take advantage of human affliction. The cruelest of the cruel are those who do this. Such prophecies and direct knowledge were real in Malachi’s day and in the days of the inspired apostles, but not now. We have the completed revelation of God’s Word and have no need for the miraculous.

Two, Malachi directed people to keep the Law of Moses. This was a good Law, but not perfect. It would do until the perfect Law was revealed, which it was in Christ, then confirmed by those who heard Him (Mark 16:20). There is very prevalent teaching today that says we are not under law but under grace. This, when believed, leads one to believe that he is under no law whatever, that it is all a matter of grace. This is misleading and dangerous. We are not under the Law of Moses. That Law accomplished its purpose and ceased when Jesus abrogated it at the cross (Col. 2:14). But we are under the Law of Christ and must do His commands (John 14:15). We are also under the grace of God and are saved by it (Eph. 2:8). If we are not faithful, we can even “fall from grace” (Gal. 5:4). As Malachi directed the people to keep the Law of Moses, so we must be obedient to the Law of Christ.

Three, Malachi was a prophet who was not afraid to denounce sin with divine threats. He did not soften the messages to spare feelings. He rebuked severely when he had to and for the purpose of saving the ones who were in error. Our reproving and rebuking today must be done in love and in the fear of God (2 Tim. 4:1-2). We must be as “gentle as the nurse that cherisheth her children” (1 Thess. 2:7). But we must be firm. Oh, how we need men (and women) of God who will stand up and teach in their respective spheres, stand up and teach without

fear or favor. To compromise the truth is to coddle the devil. And, when truth is compromised, the devil must laugh all the way to hell and back! Is the devil real? We better believe it. He lives in evil people, and they are real, aren't they? They are dead in sin but very much alive physically. Yes, the devil is real and must be resisted.

Four, Malachi emphasized the love God had for His people, Israel. Fleshly Israel did not deserve the great love God had for them, nor do we as spiritual Israel deserve the love He has for us. But He goes right on loving us anyway. Malachi must have been a man of God who had very tender emotions and could turn them on in the right way when the occasion demanded. Love on the part of God and man can be both tender and severe. The apostle talked about the "goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). Dealing with backsliding Israel, Malachi had to be both severe and tender (Jer. 3:6). He must have often felt like Jesus did when he looked over the city of Jerusalem, knowing the terrible fate that awaited her: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" (Matt. 23:37). How tender! How pathetic! Someone said that Henry Drummond summed up the entire ministry of Jesus in a dramatic sentence: "He looked, and then he wept, and then he died." God loves the masses of mankind today just like He did in Malachi's day. And His Son, Jesus, still weeps over the lost!

Five, Malachi strongly pronounced the judgment of God upon all mankind. He closes his book by talking about "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." How great it will be to see Malachi and all the other great prophets and servants of Jehovah God. And the faithful will see them in that land that is "fairer than day." Today, when we observe and listen to a man we determine his character. We know Malachi was one of the Lord's most noble servants. We have a very short introduction to him but it is an introduction that is, in

importance, as long as the length and breadth of the earth. Listen to a man talk, and we know something about the man. Yes, many scholars believe that Malachi continued with the teachings of Nehemiah and Zechariah. By reading their books, we have a further introduction to this great work of Malachi. You, dear reader, will note that I have purposely stayed away from the text itself. I offer my prayers and support to the one whose lesson follows mine. I trust that the book has been fairly well-introduced. With God's help, I have given it my best effort.

CHAPTER 36

Commentary On The Book Of Malachi

Roy Deaver

Introduction

THE NAME “MALACHI” MEANS “messenger of Jehovah.” According to the **Dickson Analytical Bible**, page 1074, Malachi was contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah and wrote about 445 B.C. The conditions under which Malachi labored were very similar to those under which Ezra and Nehemiah labored (consider Neh. 13:10-11, 23-27, 29).

The **Dickson Bible** stresses that Malachi dealt particularly with Israel’s worship, the purity of which was essential to the purity and integrity of the nation. The **Dickson Bible** suggests that only through this purity of worship would the people be kept from idolatry.

This brief note regards the style employed by the prophet. (1) The prophet first sets forth a truth; (2) then he introduces a possible objection; (3) then he deals with the objection; and (4) then he sets forth emphatic additions to his original statement.

We list here some of the conditions which called forth the message of Malachi. (1) The temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt. (2) Times were hard because of drought, famine, and blighted crops. (3) The priests themselves had grown careless. (4) The people were characterized by

indifference and spiritual lethargy. (5) The people had been in the land for approximately one hundred years. (6) The walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. (7) The people had come to doubt God's love for them. (8) The people questioned whether there was any Divine justice. (9) Since the wicked prospered, the people questioned whether there was any value in walking before God and obeying His commands. (10) The people asked: If God is good, why do the wicked prosper? And why do the righteous suffer?

Following is the "Outline of Malachi" by Samuel J. Shultz (Harper & Row, **The Old Testament Speaks**, p. 420):

1. Israel as God's favored nation (Mal. 1:1-5);
2. Israel's disrespect for God (1:6-14);
3. Unfaithful priests rebuked (2:1-9);
4. Faithless Judah (2:10-16);
5. God's requirements (2:17-3:15);
6. The final lot of the righteous and the wicked (3:16-4:6).

Chapter One

Verse One: This is the superscription. As to its source, this is a message of Jehovah. As to its nature, it is (1) the "burden" of the Word of Jehovah, (2) the "oracle" of Jehovah, and (3) something to be "lifted up"—to be proclaimed—to God's people.

The message is addressed to Israel, God's people, those who have been back in their land for approximately one hundred years and through whom God was working out the Messianic hopes and plans.

The means by which the message was delivered to the people was Malachi—prophet of God, messenger of Jehovah.

Verses 2-5: God emphasizes His love for Israel. We have an announcement: God says to Israel, "I have loved you." The people had reached the condition in which they

doubted God's love for them. God's statement means: I have loved you in the past, I do love you now, and I will keep on loving you.

We have a question: "Wherein hast thou loved us?" That is: "How can you say that you love us? Just look at our condition, our circumstances!"

Then, God responds. God says, "Consider Esau." Esau was Jacob's brother. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, and the Israelites were descendants of Jacob. God says: "I have loved Jacob, and I have hated Esau." That is, "I have loved the descendants of Jacob, and I have hated the descendants of Esau."

God sets forth the evidence of His hatred of the Edomites. God says:

I have laid waste his mountains. I have left his heritage to jackals of the wilderness. If Edom says: We are shattered, but we will rebuild the waste places; they may build, but I will throw them down. Men shall call Edom the border of wickedness. Men shall call Edom the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever. Your eyes shall see this. You shall say: The Lord be magnified beyond the borders of Israel (Mal. 1:3-5).

The book of Obadiah deals with the destruction of Edom. God stressed that neither geography nor allies nor human wisdom (wise men) nor military might would save Edom from destruction. Edom said, "Who shall bring me down?" (Obad. 3). God said, "I will!" (v. 4). God would destroy Edom because Edom had failed to help Judah when she ought to have helped Judah. She had "stood aloof" (Berkeley, v. 11); she had stood "on the other side" (KJV, v. 11). She was guilty of violence against Judah. Edom was an implacable enemy of Judah (and of Israel). God's punishment of Edom would thus emphasize His love for Israel.

These observations:

1. Regardless of the circumstances, whether good or bad, we must never question God's love for us. God loves all men, and, "much more," He loves the church. God has proclaimed His love for us, and God does not lie!

2. Even when things don't go as I think they should, I am not justified in concluding that, "Therefore, God doesn't love me."

3. To "stand aloof" with regard to God's will, and God's way, and God's people is to stand **with** the enemy. The Lord said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

Verses 6-9: God charges the priests with disrespect. God says to the priests: a son honors his father; a servant knows and respects his master; I, Jehovah, am a father and a master; where then is my honor? my respect? my reverence?

God says further to the priests, "You have despised my name." The priests ask, "How have we despised thy name?" God answered, "You bring polluted food to my altar." The priests ask, "How have we polluted thee?" God explains. (1) You say and you think that the table of the Lord may be treated in a contemptible way. (2) You offer blind animals for sacrifices (and this is wrong)! (3) You offer the lame and the sick animals (and this is bad). For example, offer such gifts to your governor! Would he be pleased with your gifts? Would he show favor? God stresses that, with such sacrifices from their hand, He could not show favor toward them. God said further, "Therefore, you priests, entreat God earnestly" (by offering right sacrifices).

These observations:

1. The priests were taking the lead in corrupting the worship. They were acting as if God had given no instruction about Israel's worship. Their attitude seemed to be, it really doesn't make any difference as to **how** men

worship, just so long as they worship. Many today have this same attitude. It was wrong then; it is wrong now.

2. In John 4:24, our Lord set forth the Divine standard for true worship. The New Testament sets out the specific items (or acts) of worship which relate to that standard. We must see to it that our worship conforms to the New Testament teaching.

3. Purity of worship is essential to the purity of the people, and the purity of the people is essential to their having God's favor and blessings.

4. God (in regard to our giving) will not accept our left-over scraps! We must bring to Him our very best. We must offer as He has instructed us.

Verses 10-14: God continues to speak to the priests. He says: (1) It would be better for the temple doors to be shut than for hypocritical and vain worship to continue. (2) I have no pleasure in you. (3) I will not accept an offering from your hand. (4) I intend for my name to be honored and respected among all the nations, and for pure worship to be offered everywhere; but **you** profane my name, and **you** engage in sinful worship! (5) You say: The Lord's table is polluted; its food is contemptible; what a weariness—what a burden—it is to worship. (6) You have sniffed at it. (7) You have brought to me that which was taken by violence, and lame, and sick. (8) I will not accept it from your hand. (9) Cursed be the cheating deceiver who has a male in his flock and vows to offer it, yet sacrifices to God a blemished and diseased thing! (10) I am a great King, and My name is held in reverence among all the nations.

Observations:

1. The fact that one “worships” does not guarantee that he is worshiping acceptably.

2. Hypocritical worship is worse than no worship.

3. The basic question in worship is, “What will please God?”—not, “What will please **me**? or **us**?”

4. It is important to note that there are some people from whom God will not accept worship.

5. There is such a thing as “vain” worship. “Vain” worship will not be accepted by God. The Lord discussed “vain worship” in Matthew 15:9. “Vain” is the translation of the Greek **matan**, which means “to no purpose.” It accomplishes nothing. Several things could cause the “worship” to be “vain worship”: (1) improper attitude upon the part of the worshiper; (2) absence of Divine authority for that engaged in; (3) hypocrisy in the heart of the worshiper; (4) teaching for doctrine the commands of men (Matt. 15:9); (5) improper relationship between husband and wife (1 Pet. 3:7).

6. God had rather see this church building closed than to see the people engage in vain worship.

7. God intends that, among all the nations, (1) His name be respected and (2) His worship be pure. There may be in this passage (Mal. 1:11) a prophetic glimpse of the universality of the Gospel of Christ.

8. “Vain worship” is “profane worship” (vv. 10, 12).

9. It is false doctrine that the Divine prescriptions for acceptable worship may be disregarded or disrespected without tragic consequences.

10. There is something wrong—and we are not really worshipping—when worship becomes a wearisome thing, a drudgery, a burden. David said, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psm. 122:1).

11. Men may, and often do, sniff at what God has prescribed, but sniffing at it does not change it!

12. False worshipers may succeed in deceiving themselves, but they cannot deceive God (cf. Acts 5:1-11).

13. Old Testament Israel was obligated (and privileged) to give as God had instructed her. New Testament Israel—the church—is obligated (and privileged) to give as God has instructed her.

14. At all times, in all places, in all circumstances, let us be careful to honor and to magnify the name of God. Sometimes the name of God is blasphemed because of the ungodly conduct of church members.

Chapter Two

Verses 1-9: God continues to deal with the wicked priests. God addresses the priests, and stresses: this commandment is for **you**. God says: if you will not hear me and if you will not lay to heart and give glory to my name, then (1) I will send a curse upon you; (2) I will curse your blessings (and, in fact, have already done so); (3) I will denounce your offspring; (4) I will spread filth on your faces; and (5) you shall know that I have sent this order to you, that my covenant might be with Levi.

God discusses His covenant with Levi. God says: (1) my covenant was with him; (2) it was a covenant of life and peace; (3) I gave him life and peace that he might stand in awe; (4) he stood in awe of me; (5) he regarded my name with reverence; (6) the law of truth was in his mouth; (7) unrighteousness was not found in his lips; (8) he walked with me in peace and uprightness; and (9) he turned many from iniquity.

God sets out the proper function of the priest. God says: (1) he should keep and speak knowledge; (2) men should seek God's laws from his (the priest's) mouth; (3) he is God's messenger.

God, through the prophet, continues to rebuke the sinful priests. God says: (1) you have turned aside from the way; (2) you have caused many to stumble in the Law; (3) you have corrupted the covenant of Levi; (4) you ought to be respected and to be held in high esteem, but I have made you despised and abased before all the people; (5) you have not kept my ways; (6) you have shown partiality in the execution of the law.

Verses 10-17: God deals with the sins of the people. The prophet asks: Have we not all one Father? Are we not all members of the same family? Has not one God created us? Then why are we faithless to one another? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers?

God, through the prophet, makes specific charges against the people. He says: (1) Judah has been faithless; (2) an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; (3) Judah has profaned the Lord's sanctuary, which He loves; (4) Judah has become involved in idolatry—Judah “has married the daughter of a strange god.” The prophet warns that God will “cut off” from Him all such transgressors.

The prophet speaks of the peoples' worship, which God would not accept. He says: you come to the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping, with sighing; this, because God no longer regards your offering; He no longer accepts your offering from your hand.

The prophet asks “Why won't God accept our worship?” and proceeds to answer the question. He explains: (1) God has been witness between you and the wife of your youth; (2) you have been unfaithful to that wife, though she is still your companion, and she is still your wife. The prophet explains God's view of the matter: (1) anyone with any intelligence does not act that way; (2) God desires godly offspring in your homes; (3) God hates divorce; (4) God hates cruelty. Therefore, said the prophet, (1) control yourselves and (2) be faithful to God and to the wife of your youth.

The prophet makes another charge against the people. He says, “You have wearied the Lord with words.” Then, he says, “you ask, how have we wearied Him?” Answer: (1) You say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord (and you thus teach a perverted

doctrine). (2) You say that God delights in those who do evil (another perverted doctrine). (3) You say, “Where is the God of justice?”

These observations:

1. When God, through His prophets, got ready to talk to men about their sins, He did not beat around the bush. He did not use a “how-to-win-friends” approach. In this instance, He specifies: (1) I am talking to you **priests**; (2) this message is for **you**! It is written about our Lord that “when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables they perceived that he spake of them” (Matt. 21:45). They got the point!

2. God is faithful to keep His promises. God, through Moses, had set before Israel the blessings and the curses (Deut. 28). Moses said, “If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments” (v. 1), then God will be with you and will bless you—your nation, your families, your flocks, and your lands. “But...if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments” (v. 15), then all these curses shall come upon you. Moses proceeded to specify the curses which God would send.

And now, here in Malachi 2:2, the prophet emphasizes that “If you do not listen and if you do not take these things to heart,” then God will send “his curse upon you”—**God will keep His word**! Peter declares, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise” (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul says, “for he is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23).

3. Relative to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, God made a covenant with Levi, and God expected men to respect that covenant. In our day, God has one law, one body of doctrine, one covenant, for all men, and God expects **all men everywhere** to respect that covenant.

4. In attitude and in conduct let us strive to be like Levi. May God help us (1) to love and to respect the New

Covenant under which we live; (2) to be grateful for the life and peace which the New Covenant provides; (3) to stand in awe before God; (4) to regard God's name with reverence; (5) to speak the law of truth always; (6) to be pure in heart and pure in speech; (7) to walk before God in uprightness; and (8) to turn many from iniquity.

5. Every Christian is a priest of God (Rev. 5:10) and, as such, is obligated (and privileged) to offer himself/herself as a living sacrifice unto God (Rom. 12:1-2). Every true priest of God (1) must keep and preserve knowledge, (2) must speak knowledge, (3) must teach others God's Law, and (4) must be a faithful messenger of God.

6. As was the case in the days of Malachi, just so it is now—that is, many “priests” have ceased to be faithful to God. They have turned aside from the way. They have caused many to stumble. They have failed to live according to God's covenant. They have become despised and abased before the faithful. They have failed to apply God's Law impartially.

7. All those who are “in Christ” have “one Father” and are all members of the same spiritual family, the Lord's church. As brethren, (1) we must love one another, (2) we must consider one another, (3) we must be faithful to each other, and (4) we must be faithful to the New Covenant.

8. It is not enough for one simply to come to the place of worship, or even to come with tears. We can truly worship God **only** by doing what He said we must do and be in worship.

9. God will not accept the worship of those (1) who are hypocrites, (2) who pay no attention to His teaching about worship and/or about conduct, (3) who disregard His instruction about the home and family.

10. It was God Himself Who established the home, and it is God Himself Who has given the rules by which the home is to be governed. In the first wedding, it was

God Himself Who gave the bride away, and God is witness in every wedding of persons who scripturally marry each other.

11. The prophet stressed the fact that God desired “godly offspring” in the home. The New Testament teaches the same thing, and God has thus placed upon parents the responsibility of developing “godly offspring.” Note especially Ephesians 6:1-4.

12. The prophet Malachi stressed, and God’s Word still teaches (1) that God is concerned about the home, (2) that God demands that the parties to the marriage vows be faithful to God and faithful to each other, (3) that God intends for the marriage to be a lifetime situation—that the husband and wife live faithfully together until separated by death, (4) that one who has been unscripturally put away is **still** the wife or husband of the one who did the putting away (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1); (5) that a marriage can be “right” in the sight of men that is wrong in the sight of God; (6) that God still hates divorce; (7) that God hates cruelty—of a husband toward his wife, of a wife toward her husband, of parents toward their children, of children toward their parents.

13. We have an amazing prescription given by God. (1) Control yourselves; (2) be faithful to God and to His Law; (3) be faithful to each other.

14. The prophet declared to the people, “You have wearied the Lord with words.” The prophet specifies: (1) you say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord; (2) you say that God delights in those who do evil; (3) you say that God does not always deal justly.

These people were guilty of carelessness of speech. They were actually speaking words of blasphemy. They were saying things they ought not to have been saying. They were not saying things they ought to have been saying. They were teaching false doctrines. They were leading others astray.

These people were guilty of unsound reasoning. The “law of rationality” holds that “we ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence.” But these people had drawn conclusions that were **not** supported by adequate evidence and that were not demanded by the evidence. They had observed cases in which men did evil, and yet these men God did not immediately punish. They had observed evil men who were materially prosperous in this life. They concluded, therefore, (1) “evil” must be “good” in the sight of the Lord and (2) God delights in evil. Neither conclusion was justified, and both conclusions were false!

These people failed to recognize that any doctrine which contradicts plain Bible teaching is false doctrine. God’s Word clearly revealed (1) the meaning of “evil,” (2) God’s hatred of “evil,” and (3) the fact of God’s justice. The doctrines of these people clearly contradicted these teachings of God’s Word. These doctrines of these people were, therefore, false doctrines.

Furthermore, the people were guilty of the sin of presumption. They assumed to themselves the authority and the right and the ability to pass judgment upon God. They said, “where is God’s justice?” The fact that one is so blind that he cannot **see** the justice of God does not **prove** that the justice is **not there**!

Chapter Three

Verses 1-5: In this section we have marvelous promises, God says. (1) I will send my messenger. (2) This messenger will prepare the way before me (we **note** that this messenger is identified in the New Testament as being John the Baptizer—Matt. 17:13; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:17). (3) I will send the Lord, the Messiah—this is the One Whom you seek—and He shall suddenly come to His temple (cf. Luke 2:22ff; 2:49). (4) The Lord whom I will send is (1) the Messenger of the covenant, (2) the One in Whom you delight, and (3) the One Who is coming.

Significant questions: “But who can **endure** the day of His coming? Who will be able to **stand** when He appears? What will be the nature of His work?” (emp. mine throughout, RD). Answer: He is like a refiner’s fire; He is like a fuller’s soap; He will sit as a refiner; He will sit as a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi—that is, He will refine them like gold and silver; they will present offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then, says the Prophet, the offerings of Judah and of Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old, as in former years.

God re-emphasizes the promise. He says, “I will draw near to you **for judgment**; I will be a swift witness” against sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, against those who oppress others (such as the wage earner in his wages, the widow, the orphan, the sojourner/the foreigner), and against those who do not revere Me.

Let us observe:

1. This wonderful prophecy, and its fulfillment in the life and work of John the Baptizer, and in the coming of the Messiah, declares (1) the miraculous inspiration by which Malachi spoke and (2) the Deity of our Lord, the Coming One, the Messiah.

2. The Messiah was the One (1) for Whom the Jews were looking (but Whom they rejected when He came), (2) for Whom John the Baptizer would prepare the way, (3) Who would come immediately following the work of John the Baptizer, (4) Who would come to His temple, (5) Whom God would call the “Messenger of the Covenant,” (6) Who would come for judgment, (7) Who would deal with the priests and with the people (Judah), and (8) Who would make possible worship acceptable to God.

Verses 6-7: Here is set forth a strong appeal. The word “for” of verse six connects us with what has preceded. These Jews had questioned the justice of God. They asked, “Where is the God of justice?” In the great prophecy

concerning the coming of the Messiah it has been stressed that God is indeed **the God of justice**. But now, in verse six, it is stressed that God is not only the God of justice, but that He is also the God of mercy. God says, “I the Lord do not change.” God’s nature does not change, and His every action is according to and in harmony with that nature.

God explains, “therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” If God had dealt with these people as they deserved to be dealt with, long before they would have been destroyed. But, God’s mercy (goodness, longsuffering) continued to give them time and opportunities to repent.

God charges these people. He says, “From the days of your fathers,” (1) “You have turned aside from my statutes” and (2) “You have not kept them.” God pleads with the people: (1) **the plea**—return to me; (2) **the promise**—“And I will return to you;” (3) **the people’s response**—they say, “How shall we return?”

Let us observe:

1. We need to try to understand the Bible teaching on the nature of God. God does not, and in fact cannot, do anything that is out of harmony with or contradictory to His nature. God is the God of justice, but He is also the God of mercy. His justice does not cancel out His mercy, and His mercy does not cancel out His justice.

2. If God had dealt with you and me on the basis of what we truly deserved, we would have been destroyed long ago. But God loves us and extends His mercy to us and gives us time and opportunities to straighten things out and to prepare for eternity with Him. How grateful we ought to be.

3. Like the Jews about whom Paul wrote in Romans 2:4, many today fail to understand the **goodness of God**. They fail to grasp the fact that this goodness is intended to give men time and opportunities to repent. This goodness does not mean that God is weak or that He is not just or that He will not keep His word.

4. When the Gentiles gave God up, then God gave them up (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). When men leave God, God leaves them. When men return to God, God will return to them. In fact, when the sinner starts back to God, God will **run** to meet him (cf. Luke 15:20).

5. God said to the Jews, **return to me!** This meant: return in reverence and respect for My Word; return in genuine repentance for your sins; return to recognizing My love for you; return to purity of worship; return to respecting and honoring God in your offerings; return to respect for God's laws regarding the family; return to purity of heart and purity of speech; return to purity in **worship**. This is the message which God speaks today to those who have departed from the right way.

6. God said to these Jews, I will return to you. This means, in context, I will forgive your sins; I will be your God, and you will be My people; I will bless your families, your labors, your lands, your flocks, and your herds; I will accept your **worship**. This is the promise which God makes today to those who return to Him.

7. The people responded to God's plea with this question: how shall we return? Let us assume that the question was asked, not in haughtiness and sarcasm, but in honesty and in sincerity. God's answer was (1) quit robbing God, (2) quit trying to deceive God, (3) give as you have been instructed by God's law, (4) quit engaging in blasphemous speech (making false charges against God), and (5) straighten up your lives—in attitude, in conduct, and with regard to **worship**.

Verses 8-12: In this section, God charges the Jews with robbery. God says: (1) Will a man rob God? (2) Yet, you are robbing Me. The people asked, "How have we robbed Thee?" Then, God explains. He says: (1) you have robbed Me in tithes and offerings; (2) you are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me; and (3) the whole nation is robbing Me.

God instructs the people to (1) bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so there may be food in My house and (2) test Me, put Me to the test; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you; see if I will not pour out for you a “more than sufficient blessing.”

God promises that (1) I will abundantly bless you, (2) I will rebuke the devouring locusts, (3) I will bless your land and your vines, (4) all nations shall call you blessed, and (5) you shall be a delightful land.

These observations:

1. God is not pleased with partial service. He commanded the Jews to “bring the whole tithe”—not just a part of it. God’s people **now** are instructed (1) to love God with **all** the heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:29-30); (2) to put God and His kingdom **first** (Matt. 6:33); (3) to fasten the mind upon things that are above (Col. 3:2); and (4) to give as we have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2). God demands total commitment and is not pleased when we do less than He has required of us.

2. It is tragic indeed that men **can** and that men **do** rob God. Old Testament Judah robbed God by withholding from God that which was due to God. They were thus guilty of the sin of defrauding God. James refers to the wages which are owed, but which are kept back by fraud (Jas. 5:4). Paul says to husbands and wives, “Defraud ye not one another” (1 Cor. 7:5).

Men rob God (1) by failing to use their time properly and wisely, to the glory of God (cf. Eph. 5:15); (2) by failing to present their members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6:13); (3) by failing to present their very bodies as living sacrifices unto God (12:1-2); (4) by failing to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4); (5) by failing to give as they ought to give, keeping for themselves that which actually ought to be “given” to the Lord’s work; and (6) by failing to labor constantly in the Lord’s work (cf. Mark 13:34).

The New Testament teaches that we are to render unto God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21), that we are "stewards," responsible for proper use of that which He has committed to our care (Luke 16:1-13; Matt. 25:14-30): "Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

3. God challenged the Jews to "put Him to the test" and see what He would do for them. No man can outgive God! The Lord says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Paul declares:

And God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work: (as it is written, He hath scattered abroad, he hath given to the poor; His righteousness abideth for ever. And he that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness:) ye being enriched in everything unto all liberality, which worketh through us thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:8-11).

What a beautiful promise!

Verses 13-15: Herein, God makes another charge against the Jews. He says, "You have spoken obstinate words against me." The people say, "How have we spoken against thee?" God explains: you say that (1) "it is vain to serve God"; (2) "there is no value in keeping His charge"; (3) "there is no value in walking mournfully before God"; (4) "the arrogant are blessed"; (5) "evildoers prosper"; and (6) "evildoers test God and escape punishment."

Observations:

1. We must be careful to keep our speech pure. God is always listening.

2. This charge emphasizes the sin of drawing unwarranted conclusions, based upon what **we** think, and what **we** want, and **how** things look to **us**.

3. In making this charge against the Jews, God is saying that (1) it **does** pay to serve God; (2) there **is** value in obeying God; (3) things are not always what they **seem** to be.

Verses 16-18: God takes note of the faithful. Those who revered the Lord conversed with one another. God Himself listened to these conversations. He heard what was said, and He kept a book of remembrance of those who “revered the Lord” and who “thought on His name; of those who spoke about the faithful.” God said: (1) they shall be Mine (in that day when I prepare My special possession, when I make up My jewels), and (2) I will spare them as a man spares his faithful son.

God spoke further about that day. He says: (1) then, you will distinguish clearly between the righteous and the wicked and (2) then, you will distinguish clearly between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Let us observe:

1. It is gratifying to observe that, in spite of the wickedness of the “whole nation,” there was a faithful remnant. It is possible for one to be faithful to God in spite of the wickedness of the world, and in spite of the wickedness of brethren.

2. It is tremendously important for the faithful to speak often to one another. This speech must grow out of hearts of love and concern. This speech must be designed to encourage, to strengthen, to correct. We speak to one another in our singing (Eph. 5:19). We exhort one another in our worship (Heb. 10:25). We are instructed to exhort one another day by day (3:13).

3. Let us keep in mind at all times, in all places, and in every circumstance, that God **sees** what we do and **hears** what we say.

4. The righteous revere God, converse with one another, are recorded in God’s book of remembrance,

think upon God's name, persevere, and will fare wonderfully in the Day of Judgment.

5. Verses sixteen through eighteen set out certain information about the judgment. That day **is** coming. Pending that day, God keeps a "book of remembrance." On that day God will make up His jewels (prepare His special possession, gather His own property). On that day it will be emphatically evident that (1) there is a real difference between the righteous and the wicked and (2) that it **does pay to serve God**. But I do not have to wait until the judgment to learn that this is the case. I must learn what God has to say about the matter, and give heed to the same.

Chapter Four

Verses 1-3: The prophet stresses that God will deal with the wicked and with the righteous. We note carefully an announcement: "Behold, the day cometh." Reference has been made (in Mal. 3:16-18) to the Day of Judgment. The prophet now stresses the fact that that day will come.

God sets out the **nature** of that day. That day shall burn as an oven (a furnace). All the proud and all that do wickedness shall be stubble and shall be burned up. Not a root or branch will be left. **Note:** this probably refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., which destruction the Lord discussed as a type of the final coming and final judgment of all men (Matt. 24-25).

Then, there is another announcement: the Sun will arise. This message has a special relationship to those who revered God's name, mentioned in 3:16-17. The "Sun of Righteousness" would "arise with healing in his wings." This coming would bring great joy. There would be marvelous victory over the wicked. The "Sun of Righteousness" is without doubt the Messiah, the Christ.

Observations:

1. Again, Malachi stresses that wickedness will be punished and righteousness will be rewarded. The New

Testament teaches that there is eternal life for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked (Matt. 25:46).

2. There is a Judgment Day coming, the anti-type of the destruction of Jerusalem, and at that time God “will render to every man according to His works” (Rom. 2:6): “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

3. This life—one’s life on earth—relates to a constant battle, a battle between wickedness and righteousness. So often it **appears** that the forces of Satan are winning the battle. However, we are assured in Scripture that righteousness ultimately will be victorious.

4. Malachi speaks to the problem of premillennialism. God, through Malachi, especially in 4:1, speaks of the complete destruction of the Jewish nation. The wicked Jews would be like stubble; they would be burned up; not a branch would be left. The Lord taught the same thing: (1) “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38); (2) “There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down” (24:2); (3) the denounced barren fig tree “withered away **from the roots**” (Mark 11:20).

And there is no passage which teaches that God will restore the condemned and destroyed literal nation of Israel. In this, the Christian Age, God deals with **all men** only upon the terms of the Gospel of Christ. What the sun is to the solar system, the Christ (the Sun of Righteousness) is to the Scheme of Redemption and to all humanity.

Verses 4-6: Here, we have an appeal and a promise. God says, “Remember the law of Moses, My Servant, which I commanded him, at Horeb, for all Israel, and keep its statutes and ordinances.”

Then, there is the marvelous promise. God says: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the

coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.” God explains that this prophet will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” This great prophecy refers to the coming of and the work of John the Baptizer as the forerunner of the Messiah (Matt. 17:9-13; Luke 9:9-13; 1:17).

Let us observe:

1. The problems of Old Testament Israel were the result of their disrespect for God and His Word. It is so fitting that, in closing the book of God’s Old Testament prophets, He instructed the Jews to “Remember the law of Moses.” We need constantly to remind ourselves and others to “Remember the Gospel, the Law of Jesus Christ.”

2. We note these things about the Law of Moses. It was from God. It was through Moses. It was to and for Israel. It was given at Horeb. It was to be observed (to be respected and to be kept) by the Jews who lived between Sinai (Horeb) and the cross.

3. The closing reference to the coming and work of John the Baptizer suggests one of Judah’s great problems: the deterioration of the home as God wanted it to be. Among other things, John would work to bring about a better relationship between fathers and their children. May God help us all, always, to love, respect, and apply the sacred rules God has given for the home as God wants it to be. Let us see to it that our homes conform to the Divine pattern.

4. The Old Testament closes with four wonderful prophecies. With Malachi, the Sun of the Prophetic Word was sinking behind Judean hills. There would be a night of darkness and silence extending over four hundred years. But, after this long night, (1) the voice of one who was “much more than a prophet”—John the Baptizer—would be heard, and (2) the Sun of Righteousness would arise

with healing in His wings. These “wings” are the great truths which make up the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The prophet speaks of (1) the coming of John the Baptizer, (2) the coming of the Messiah and the blessings of His day, (3) the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation, and (4) the final judgment—of which the destruction of Jerusalem was a type. These prophecies, given hundreds of years before the actual events, declare the inspiration by which Malachi spake.

Additional Observations

1. It seems to this writer that the basic message of Malachi is that (a) God had loved His people, the Jews, and continued to love them but (2) that they had not made proper response to His love. Malachi teaches that God expects us to make proper response to God’s love.

2. Haggai and Zechariah had inspired and aroused the people to **build** the temple. Malachi pleads with them to make **proper use** of that temple.

3. Often it is said to Gospel preachers, “Why don’t you preach on God’s love?” Let it be stressed that preaching on God’s love does not preclude, but rather compels, denouncing sin.

Malachi began his message by stressing God’s love for the hearers. Yet Malachi, God’s messenger, said: (1) you question God’s love for you; (2) you have despised the name of God; (3) you have polluted the table of the Lord; (4) you have disregarded God’s law on marriage; (5) you have wearied God with your careless words; (6) you have robbed God; (7) you have spoken against God.

4. A terrible and tragic sin of Judah was ritualism and formalism in their worship—or in that which they intended to be their worship. Their hearts were not right before God, and their worship was not being accepted by God; but they went through the forms and motions.

This suggests to us a great danger we face today. In Hosea 6:6, God said to His people, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Even a casual glance at the Mosaic system will reveal that God clearly demanded these sacrifices and burnt offerings. But without the proper attitude behind these sacrifices, they are not acceptable to God. So, the Lord said to the Pharisees: “But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13).

We, too, need to learn and to keep in mind “what this meaneth.” There is the ever-present danger of our singing without singing, of praying without praying, of teaching without teaching, of observing the Lord’s Supper without observing the Lord’s Supper, of giving without giving. In all our work and worship let us be careful **not** to drift into formalities, but to have and to maintain the right attitude. We must be right in **object** of worship, in **authority** in worship, and in **attitude** (in spirit) in worship (John 4:24).

Sins Specified In The Book Of Malachi

1. Questioning the love of God;
2. Failure to honor, to respect, to reverence God;
3. Failing to show proper respect for things sacred;
4. Failing to worship exactly as God prescribed;
5. Failing to give as God had instructed;
6. Profaning the name of God;
7. An attitude of contempt for Divinely prescribed worship;
8. Attempting to deceive God;
9. Worshiping in vain;
10. Turning aside from God’s way;
11. Causing others to stumble;
12. Corrupting the covenant of God;
13. Applying the laws of God with partiality;
14. Being inconsiderate of and unfaithful to each other;
15. Profaning the Lord’s sanctuary (defiling the body);

16. Becoming involved in idolatry;
17. Disregarding God's laws on marriage and divorce;
18. Failing to respect God's laws regarding the home;
19. Engaging in loose talk;
20. Drawing conclusions that were unjustified and that were false;
21. Sorcery;
22. Adultery;
23. False swearers;
24. Oppressing others;
25. Failing to be compassionate;
26. Failing to revere God;
27. Disregarding God's Law;
28. Failing to understand the goodness of God;
29. Robbing God;
30. Failing to give as God required;
31. Speaking words of blasphemy;
32. Rendering partial service;
33. Drawing unwarranted conclusions in matters pertaining to God;
34. Worshiping in form, but not in reality.

May God be with us and bless us as we meditate often upon the great lessons to be learned from the book of Malachi.

CHAPTER 37

Great Lessons From The Book Of Malachi

Thomas B. Warren

Outline Of Malachi

I. Fundamental affirmation: God still loves Israel (Mal. 1:1-5)

1. Affirmation stated (1:1-2)
2. Affirmation proved (1:3-5)

II. Charges (Accusations) (1:6-4:3)

1. Against the priests (1:6-2:9)
 - A. Their condition caused following charges (1:6-14).
 - a. They despised His name—yet denied it (1:6).
 - b. They offered polluted bread—yet denied it (1:7).
 - c. They offered for sacrifice that which was blind, lame, and sick (1:8).
 - d. A digression urging them to try their tactics on their governor (1:8b-9).
 - e. Shut the Temple doors (1:10; cf. Amos 5:21ff; Hos. 6:6; 8:13; Isa. 1:11ff)!
 - f. God's name is greater among the Gentiles (Mal. 1:11-12).
 - g. Worship had become a wearisome, irksome burden to them (1:13).

- h. They brought as sacrifice that which they obtained in robbery and offered the sick and lame (1:13b).
 - i. After making a vow, they refused to offer the animal which they should have offered (1:14).
 - j. The Lord explains why their actions were not acceptable (1:14b).
 - B. The consequences of such conditions (2:1-3).
 - C. Marks of a true priest (2:4-9):
 - a. Honors his covenant with God (2:4-5):
 - (a) Life and peace as a blessing—this is God's part.
 - (b) Fear and reverence for God—this is man's part.
 - b. His fear of God caused him to faithfully discharge his priestly duties (2:6):
 - (a) Law of truth was in his mouth (cf. Hab. 1:4; Hag. 2:11).
 - (b) He lived in harmony with God's will.
 - (c) He turned many away from sin.
 - c. A priest's lips should treasure knowledge (Mal. 2:7).
 - d. The people should seek the law at his mouth (2:7).
 - D. Contrast of present priests with the faithful priest (2:8-9):
 - a. They do not walk in submission to God's will (2:8).
 - b. They cause others to stumble (2:8b)—because of them men do not fear God (cf. Neh. 13:29).
 - c. They were subject to bribery and were therefore partial in their judgments (Mal. 2:9; cf. Mic. 3:11); God dispenses judgment without favor (2 Chron. 19:7).
-

2. Charges against the people (Mal. 2:10-4:3):
 - A. Emotional insensibility (1:2)—they were insensible to God’s love for them (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22).
 - B. Treachery against their wives (divorce) (2:10-16).
Three reasons why they should not divorce:
 - a. All of us are members of God’s family (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).
 - b. When our wives give us children, we must be thankful.
 - c. God is witness, and He hates divorce (cf. Matt. 19:9).
 - C. Doubt of the righteousness of God (Mal. 2:17)—they said that those who did evil were approved by God (2:7-3:6).
 - D. Covetous—they robbed God in tithes and offerings (3:7-12).
 - E. Blasphemy—they were skeptical as to whether it pays to serve God (3:13-15).

III. The pious encourage one another in an age of failure and unfaithfulness (3:16-18)

1. This should have encouraged the doubters and impious ones.
2. The pious did some commendable things (3:16).
 - A. They esteemed God’s name.
 - B. They “spoke” with one another—exhorted one another (3:16; cf. Psm. 1:1-2).
3. They properly discern between righteous and wicked (Mal. 3:17-18).

IV. God warns against Israel’s sins (4:1-3)

1. God’s judgment against sin is represented as a consuming fire or a blazing sun (4:1a).
2. The destruction will be total (4:1; Matt. 7:24-27).
3. But the righteous shall be blessed; they shall have great exuberance of vitality and joy (4:2-3).

V. A final word of exhortation to obedience (4:4-6)

1. Remember the Law of Moses, God's servant (4:4).
2. God will send Elijah (Christ) (4:5).
3. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (4:6).

Introduction

MALACHI, THE LAST BOOK in our English version of the Bible, was the last word from God until the first book of the New Testament was written. About four hundred years intervened between the time of the close of the Old Testament canon and the opening events recorded in the Gospels.

Just as Nehemiah records the closing **events** of the Old Testament, so Malachi is the last voice of the prophets. Even though Malachi was written to the people of God in Old Testament times, it also serves as admonition and warning to all men, both then and now (cf. Rom. 15:4).

The Writer

Nothing is known of the life of the author of this book. Some scholars even doubt that we know his name. They contend that, since "Malachi," which is the Hebrew word for "my messenger," appears nowhere else as a proper name, it should not be considered to be one in connection with this book. They further point out that the same Hebrew word appears in Malachi 3:1, where it clearly is not a proper name. Neither the LXX (Septuagint) nor the Targum recognizes "Malachi" as a proper name. Other scholars contend that "Malachi" should be considered as the proper name of the writer of this book because the prophets did not write anonymously. At any rate, by the second century A.D., "Malachi" was recognized as a proper name.

Historical Background

The book itself does not give the date of its writing. However, most scholars agree that the writer of the book dealt with much the same problems as were prevalent during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Many scholars contend that the book has its setting in the interval between the two visits of Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Passages in the two books of Malachi and Nehemiah show that much the same problems were considered in each work. The following passages should be compared: Malachi 2:10-16 and Nehemiah 13:23ff; Malachi 3:8-10 and Nehemiah 13:10-12; Malachi 2:8 and Nehemiah 13:29.

From about 606 to 586 B.C., many of the people of Judah were carried into Babylonian captivity. After seventy years, about 536 B.C., about 42,000 Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem. Then, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the priest, the work of rebuilding the temple was begun. However, the work of rebuilding soon stopped because of the opposition in the land. After the work had been stopped awhile, Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the work to begin once more. The temple was rebuilt about 520-516 B.C. Then, about sixty years later (around 457 B.C.), Ezra had come from Babylon to Jerusalem to help encourage and reorganize the nation. Then, about thirteen years later (around 444 B.C.), Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and directed the rebuilding of the wall. This seems to have been close to the time of the conditions and events described in Malachi. Thus it seems that the Jews had been home about one hundred years in Malachi's time. It has been affirmed that "many scholars are of the opinion that the book was written shortly before the coming of Ezra. This date (ca. 460 B.C.) is very generally accepted" (J. T. H. Adamson, in Davidson, Stibbs, and Kevan, **New Bible Commentary**, p. 764).

Before the exile, the history of the Jews was one of lapsing into idolatry again and again. However, they had become very negligent of their worship and service to God. Further, they were not even aware that they were in a terrible spiritual condition. The priests were very lax and degenerate. The people were unfaithful to God. In an extremely lethargic and indifferent state of mind, they had settled down to wait for the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Whom they thought would lead them in becoming a great nation again. It is to people in this condition that Malachi directs his message. In doing so, he condemns (1) their doubt of God's love for them; (2) their despising of Jehovah's name; (3) their offering of polluted bread; (4) their sacrificing of blind, lame, and sick animals; (5) their growing weary with worship; (6) their failure in bringing the tithe into the storehouse; (7) their divorcing of the wives of their youth; (8) their skepticism that it pays to serve God; and (9) their doubting that Jehovah was a righteous God.

The book contains two extended lists of accusations: (1) those against the priests and (2) those against the people.

The Writer's Style

A major characteristic of the literary style of the book is the asking and answering of questions. The writer first makes a charge or accusation. Then he sets the people's reply (usually a question or a denial) to that charge. In the book there are seven distinct instances of this three-pronged method of teaching. Simply stated, the method is (1) the charge, (2) the reply, and (3) the refutation of the reply.

Analysis Of The Book

The prophet opens the book by contending that the Word of God, to be delivered by God's messenger, is to accuse or charge the people. This, in substance, is the meaning of 1:1.

The Fundamental Affirmation (1:2-5).

The Affirmation Stated (1:2)

The fundamental affirmation of this book is stated in 1:2. That affirmation is that God has loved and still does love Israel, in spite of Israel's sins. This is the real message of this book. All else that it says should be viewed in the light of this fundamental truth.

The Affirmation Denied (1:2)

Also, in verse two, by asking a question ("Wherein has thou loved us?"), the people deny that God loves them. Apparently, the people were keenly aware of the great difference between their present condition and the past glory of the kingdom of Israel. Likely, they were also discouraged by the apparent (to them) failure of the Messiah to come.

The Affirmation Proved (1:2-5)

The prophet points out that the Lord has chosen Jacob and had rejected Esau. Thus the love which God had for Israel was proved right before their eyes: Edom had been laid waste, while Israel had been blessed in being restored to its own land. Even Edom's plans to rebuild his cities were doomed to failure.

Charges Against The Priests (1:6-2:9).

The Charges Listed (1:6-14)

1. They despised Jehovah's name (1:6). After setting forth the fundamental affirmation, the prophet charges the priests with failure to honor God's name. Instead of honoring His name, they despised it. They looked contemptuously toward the Lord and toward His instructions to them, yet they denied having any knowledge of despising His name.

2. They offered polluted bread upon God's altar

(1:7). This charge is actually proof of the preceding charge that they had despised Jehovah's name. Again the priests denied any knowledge of having been guilty of the accusation. The prophet then proved his charge by accusing them of offering blind, lame, and sick animals on the altar ("Table of the Lord" and "food" or "bread" are used to refer to the various sacrifices). The blemished of any kind of animal was considered unclean and unfit to be offered as a sacrifice (cf. Deut. 15:21; 17:1; Lev. 22:20-24). The offering of such animals was an insult to God. The prophet asked them to try to present such things to their governor so that they might see that not even he would accept such offerings (Mal. 1:8b-9). Then the prophet expressed his longing for someone to close the doors of the temple. Why? Because it would be better to close the temple altogether than to have there the exhibition of the insulting sacrifices which they offered unto God (1:10). This is much the same point made in Amos 5:21-23; Hosea 6:6; 8:13; and Isaiah 1:11-17. The prophet then declared that God's name is (or "shall be," ERV) great among the Gentiles. Scholars contend that it is difficult to tell whether this statement refers to a present or future condition and whether it referred to Gentiles, proselytes, or Jews scattered among the Gentiles. At any rate, the prophet's point is this: God's name was held in higher esteem by some others than it was by those to whom Malachi was writing. Likely, he referred to Jews in other lands at that time or in prospect to Gentiles during the Gospel Age. Either of these cases should have had the effect of making the recipients of Malachi ashamed of their attitude toward God's name.

3. To them, worship had become a wearisome burden. They said, "What a burden the service of God is!" Such an attitude was sharply in contrast with that expressed by the psalmist who said, "I was glad when they

said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord” (Psm. 122:1; cf. Psm. 63:1; 84:1; 100:1). If one does not feel and understand that service to God contains its own reward as well as loving submission to God then that very service will become irksome and burdensome.

4. They broke their vows to God. The prophet here sharply condemns, not the man who denies faith in God (although all such are condemned), but the man who professes to love God, makes a vow as to what he is to give unto God, and then fails to keep the vow. “Cursed be such a cheat!” declares the prophet.

The Consequence Of Such Action (2:1-3)

The prophet declared that God would send a curse upon them and would curse their blessings. Other things would occur which would make it clear that the priests were not fit to officiate at the Lord’s altar.

The Marks Of A True Priest (2:4-9)

In making clear what they actually **were**, in contrast to what they **should** have been, the prophet then sets forth the marks of a true priest: (1) he honors his covenant with God, and, as a result, he receives life and peace as a blessing (2:4-5); (2) he fears and reverences God’s name (2:5); (3) his fear of God caused him to faithfully discharge his duties (2:6); (4) the law of truth is in his mouth, and he faithfully teaches the people (2:6-7); and (5) he turns many from lives of sin. These marks of a true priest were set forth to show the sharp contrast with the present false priests.

The Marks Of The Present False Priests (2:8-9)

The priests who received Malachi’s rebuke (1) did not walk in submission to God’s will (2:8); (2) ridiculed the covenant (2:8); (3) caused others to stumble rather than helping them (2:8)—because of them men did not fear God;

and (4) were subject to bribery and were therefore partial in their judgments (2:9). In contrast to this partiality, God dispenses judgment **without** partiality, or special favor (cf. Mic. 3:11; 2 Chron. 19:7).

Charges Against The People (1:2; 2:10-4:3)

1. They were guilty of emotional insensibility (1:2). In spite of the bountiful blessings which God had given them, they were insensible to His love for them (1:2). Such an insensibility leads to ingratitude, and ingratitude leads to disobedience. This progression seems to have been the case in the lives of the people to whom Malachi addressed his charges.

2. They were guilty of treachery against their wives (2:10-16). The prophet, having turned from the priests, denounces the people for marrying “the daughters of a strange god” (2:11). The holiness of the nation was being blighted by such marriages. Further, the prophet condemns the men for their cruel, heartless putting away of the wives of their youth. The prophet points out that God is a witness to the marriage covenant and hates putting away (divorce).

3. They doubted the righteousness of God (2:17-3:6). These people were not outright unbelievers or irreligious, but they were spiritually deficient and drew an unwarranted conclusion from the social conditions about them. They began to doubt the righteousness of God and to affirm that men who do evil are good in God’s sight. But the prophet points out that God would send His messenger to “prepare the way before me” (that is, the Lord). The coming of the Lord will prove His righteousness to these doubters. God’s judgment will come upon both the priests and the people (3:5).

4. They had robbed God (3:7-12). The prophet accuses them of having robbed God. The people profess to

be ignorant of any such robbery. The prophet then explains how they had robbed God by not bringing the full tithe into God's storehouse and also by offering the sick, the lame, and the blind (which were of no value to them). It is evil in the sight of God to fail to give as one should. To put anything before God is to manifest the fact that he does not love God (1 John 5:3; 1 Cor. 16:22).

In An Age Of Failure And Unfaithfulness The Pious Encourage One Another (3:16-18)

There were some among the people who were faithful: they "feared the Lord" and they "thought on His name"—that is, they esteemed and reverently considered His name. They "spake often one to another"—that is, they admonished, exhorted, and encouraged one another (3:16; cf. Psm. 1:1-2).

God Warns The Wicked And Encourages The Righteous (4:1-3)

The day of which the prophet here speaks was to be much like the searing eastern sun (or like a raging fire) which would scorch and wither the insolence, irreverence, and injustice of the wicked, but, for those who feared the Lord's name, it would be so healing and invigorating that they would go leaping like "calves from the stall." It will then be clear that the righteous judgments of the Lord will shine light on the dark and perplexing ways of men. This should be an encouraging thought to faithful men of all ages.

A Final Word Of Exhortation To Obedience

First, the prophet exhorts them to "remember ye the law." They were not to be carried about "by every wind of doctrine" in regard to their relationship and duty to God.

They were to guard against being unduly upset by what seemed to them to be failures in God's ruling of the world. The wicked may prosper, and the righteous may be miserable for a time but, finally, God ultimately will triumph. At the last great day, God will punish the wicked and bless the righteous (cf. Matt. 25:46).

The prophet promises that God will send "Elijah" (John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, the Messiah—Matt. 17:11-13), and that he will lead men away from sin in preparation for the coming of Christ. This was fulfilled in John's work as a forerunner of Christ (Luke 1:11-17; Matt. 3:11-12).

The Main Contribution Of This Book To The Development And Revelation Of The Scheme Of Redemption

Briefly stated, the main message of the book is that the love of God for His people is unailing, but the people must not misunderstand this love and become mere patrons of religion, for God will surely ultimately punish the wicked as a result of His wrath against sin and bless the righteous through His Son, the Messiah.

The Main Message Applied To Men In The Christian Age

From a study of Malachi and of conditions in the church today, it is easily seen that this book is as up-to-date and as timely as tomorrow morning's newspaper! It seems that one of the greatest plagues of the people of God is that of mere "patronism." Do not a great many members of the Lord's church today give mere "lip service" to the fact of God's love for man and to their own lack of love for God in return (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:19)?

Is it not likely true that many are satisfied to merely "go to church" (sit on a pew in a meeting house somewhere)

without even intending to have their hearts and lives changed by the power of God's "dynamite," His Word (Rom. 1:16; cf. Heb. 4:12)? Is it not true that, when preachers of the Gospel faithfully proclaim "the whole counsel of God" in pointing out the sins of the people, an often-repeated reaction is this: "Wherein have we sinned? Wherein have we failed to do as God would have us to do?" And, all the while, they are completely oblivious to their responsibility to reach the lost with the Gospel plan of salvation (Mark 16:15-16; cf. Lk. 19:10), to seek to lead the erring back to pathways of faithfulness (Jas. 5:19-20; Gal. 6:1-2), to minister to the needs of the unfortunate (Matt. 5:16; Mark 14:7; Jas. 1:27; et al.), and to live a life of holiness (Heb. 12:14; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Conclusion

May God help us to awaken from the spiritual lethargy which has characterized many churches and many individual children of God. During contemporary times may we awaken to a righteous response to the unfailing love of God, realizing that some day all men must stand before Christ in the Judgment to hear the words which will send us into either everlasting torment or into everlasting blessedness (2 Cor. 5:1-10; Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:28-29).

May the message of **Malachi** ever burn within the hearts of all men.