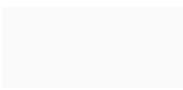


*“The
Twelve”
Minor Prophets*

by

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About this Book

The outlines of the twelve Minor Prophets given in this book were published during the years 2002 and 2003 in the *Herald of Hope* magazine and the editorial committee felt that they should be brought together into one volume. Perhaps the portion of the Bible with which Christians are least familiar is the Minor Prophets yet, when understood in their historical context, these yield a great store of practical teaching and Bible prophecy. To neglect them would be to rob ourselves of blessings which God intended through these inspired writers.



The author

The intention of the writer has been twofold:

- 1) To place the message of each book in its correct historical context and to apply the practical lessons which were the subject of the Book.
- 2) To identify the prophetic message in each Book and thus see God's ultimate purpose for His people Israel and the world.

In the space available it has not been possible to provide a detailed exegesis of each Book, however, the reader will find that once the historical setting has been established and the message made clear, a detailed study of each chapter and verse will become more fruitful.

Since as Peter said in 2 Peter 1:20: "*No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*", it is important for Christians to be familiar with ALL the books of the Bible. Verses quoted in isolation frequently become a pretext for wrong teaching. It is therefore essential that Scripture be compared with Scripture if we are to have any confidence about the mind and will of God. Scripture references have been supplied so that the reader can compare the subject passage with what is taught elsewhere in the Word of God. Quotations are from the Authorized King James Bible.

The Books have been treated in the chronological order in which they were written as indicated in the index. An outline of the history of the inter-captivity period (721 - 586BC) is included on pages 27 to 29. May the Lord richly bless the message of "The Twelve" Minor Prophets to each reader.

Roy Jensen

The Twelve Minor Prophets

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"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2Peter 1:21).

JONAH

The Sovereignty of God in Judgment and Mercy



The Book of Jonah is the fifth in order of the Minor Prophets. It is unique among the prophetic writings in that it contains no prophetic message delivered to the people of God by the prophet Jonah, but instead is a biographical narrative concerning the prophet and his responsibility. Indeed, it is in all probability autobiographical, although written mostly in the third person. The Psalm in chapter 2:2-9, as well as the conversation between the Lord and Jonah in chapter four, could only have been recorded or dictated personally by the prophet.

The book is in three parts:

1. Jonah's Disobedience - chapter 1
2. Jonah's Prayer - chapter 2
3. Jonah's Message and its Results - chapters 3 & 4.

That the Book of Jonah must be treated as real history is supported by the truth of God's Word and its presentation of Jonah as a genuine historical character. There is no reasonable doubt that the Jonah referred to is the one named in 2 Kings 14:25, where we read that Jeroboam II

"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 spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet".

It is important to notice that our Lord Jesus vouched for the historical character of Jonah, the miracle of his preservation in the great fish, which He used as a "sign" or type of His own entombment and resurrection, and the fact that the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. Jesus said:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt.12:39-41).

The Twelve Minor Prophets

The Twelve Minor Prophets It should be noted that there is no Rabbinic tradition that the canonicity of this Book of Jonah was ever challenged. Obviously, it is accepted as the inspired Word of God and intended as a message to God's people Israel, and as well to the Church. It was not written for Nineveh, even though Nineveh figures in its story, but it was written for Israel. What, then, was God saying to His people in this book?

One of the unfortunate things about the Book of Jonah is that most people know only about the great fish. Actually, only three of the forty-eight verses in this book talk about the great fish. G. Campbell Morgan correctly said,

"Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God."

To be sure there is a lesson about miracles in the story of the fish and Jonah's preservation in its belly, but that is not the central theme of the book. Taking the book as a whole, we must surely see that it is a revelation to God's people about God Himself. I find that the book says three things in particular about God.

1. His Sovereignty
2. His Judgment
3. His Mercy



1. God's Sovereignty

The story of Jonah is a message about God's absolute authority over the nations and over men. The story begins with a command to Jonah:

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it."

God was not disinterested or unconcerned about the evil enterprises of the Assyrian nation who, as Merrill Unger states,

"were given to implacable cruelty. The pages of history are nowhere more bloody than in the record of their wars."

Even after Jonah finally submitted and delivered God's message to Nineveh, and after the Ninevites repented, God did not withdraw His interest in them. Nineveh's repentance was short-lived and the nation again turned to its evil and cruel ways, only to discover that God was not mocked, for with authority He destroyed that great city in August 612 BC after a two-month siege by an alliance of the Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians

This final destruction was foretold by the prophet Nahum, and Nineveh remains, according to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*:

“a site so huge that perhaps it will never be completely excavated...Excavators have to bore through 40-50 feet of debris before Assyrian strata are reached...The nearby mound of Nebi Yunus, that is, ‘Mound of the Prophet Jonah’, contains the palace of Esarhaddon.”

Here then is a lesson concerning God’s all-sovereign power and care of nations. It had a special relevance to Israel over which the shadow of Assyria was falling, and later to Judah prior to its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.

God’s sovereignty is also seen in this book with regard to Jonah himself. Without doubt God had raised Jonah up to be His true servant and prophet. Jonah had been a faithful prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). However, here in Jonah’s own story we have him disobeying God’s commission only to discover that no one disobeys God

with impunity. Jonah’s experience in the storm and in the belly of the fish is a vivid lesson in the authority of God in disciplining His servant and bringing him into His sovereign purpose.



The reason why the fish miracle is not the main lesson of the Book of

Jonah, is because the fish was but an instrument in the hand of the sovereign Lord to help effect His purpose in Jonah’s life.

2. God’s Judgment

The story of Jonah tells of a special message which the prophet was given to preach to wicked Nineveh. The Word of the Lord came unto Jonah, saying,

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2).

In chapter 3, when God’s call to Jonah came the second time, he was commissioned to tell them that their city would be destroyed within forty days. The religion of this people had corrupted their entire life.

The Twelve Minor Prophets

History designates the Ninevites as a very cruel people. They were particularly cruel to victims and prisoners of war that they often tortured to death for sheer pleasure.

Men who do not know or worship the true God inevitably become cruel and hard in their characters. Yet, though they were pagan and did not know God, they were nevertheless deliberate sinners without excuse and so fully responsible for their wickedness. They were under the sentence of divine judgment. God said,

"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," ie visited with divine judgment.

God had said to Jonah,

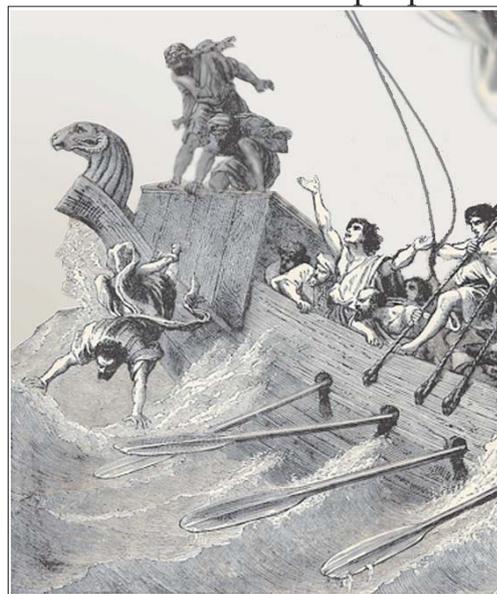
"Their wickedness is come up before me."

This picture of Nineveh makes one think of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah whose wickedness was so great that it reached the nostrils of God as a terrible moral stench, and God poured out awesome judgment upon those two cities exactly as He felt He must do upon wicked Nineveh.

How very timely is this lesson for our day and our world! Nations today are notorious for their godless behaviour and their gross cruelty to their fellow man. This message of Jonah is right up to date. In a little while God will intervene in the affairs of men and nations and will destroy the aggressors. There is need in our time for this same message of warning about impending judgment, for God will not hold back His anger forever.

In a sense, God's judgment is also revealed in what happened to Jonah in the storm and in the fish. Jonah 1:17 tells how God prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. There is a lesson to be drawn from this, that those who defy God and disobey His call will be subjected to disciplinary judgment. The path of disobedience and non-compliance to the will of God is likely to be a very stormy one. Jonah acknowledged to the sailors on board ship that it was because of his disobedience to the will of God that the storm had come.

"I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you" (Jonah 1:12).



As Christians, we must never forget that Jesus is Lord and His will is sovereign, and any disobedience to it must lead to chastening.

3. God's Mercy

The truth which we find in the Book of Jonah is as full and as fresh a revelation of God's mercy as prophecy anywhere achieves. It tells of mercy on a disobedient servant.

Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 is an expression of surprise that he is still alive in the belly of the fish, but also a thanksgiving to God for his present escape from death, as well as a hope expressed of ultimate deliverance. The fish at length vomited Jonah upon the dry land, and he was now much wiser. Jonah 3:1 says,

"the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time."

How gracious is our God, that while not overlooking our rebellion, after discipline He so often gives His children a second chance. Fortunately for Jonah, even though still reluctant and still bearing racial prejudice in his heart, he nevertheless was obedient on this second occasion.

Jonah delivered God's message to Nineveh, and there then occurred the greatest revival ever recorded in history; for Jonah 3:5 records that the people of Nineveh, from the greatest to the least of them, believed God and demonstrated their repentance. The result of Nineveh's repentance was that God spared the city.

At this, Jonah was displeased; not that his prophecy had been nullified by the repentance of the people, for he had expected their repentance and God's mercy bestowed on them. He prayed:
"O LORD, was not this my saying when I was yet in my own country? Therefore I fled 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" (Jonah 4:2).

However he probably felt that with the sparing of Nineveh the doom of his own country would be sealed.

As Jonah sat in his booth on the east side of the city, waiting to see if God's judgment would fall, the Lord prepared a gourd to shelter him from the heat. But that night He sent a worm and a vehement east wind to destroy the gourd and Jonah was exposed. By the withering of the gourd, the Lord taught him the lesson of divine compassion on man irrespective of man's racial background or relationship to the covenants of God.

The Twelve Minor Prophets

The motive that led Jonah to flee was a narrow and mistaken patriotism and racial prejudice. There's no doubt he feared that Nineveh would repent and that God in mercy would spare the city.

One chief purpose of the book was surely to teach Israel that God's mercy and His purposes of grace are not limited to the children of Abraham, but the Gentiles can receive mercy while still outside the pale of Israel's covenants. When Peter vindicated his ministry to the Gentiles (ie the house of Cornelius), the Jews of Jerusalem glorified God, saying,

"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"
(Acts 11:18).

Nowhere else in the Old Testament is this truth so vividly illustrated as in the Book of Jonah.

The heart of God is fully bared to us in the last verse, where He rebukes Jonah for his peevish prejudice and anger with the words, *"Should not I spare Nineveh?"*

Here we touch the fundamental truth of the whole book. The word *"spare"* is significant. Some translate it as *"pity"*. The Hebrew literally means *"cover"*, and it takes us immediately to the words that Jesus uttered over Jerusalem in Matt 23:37.

"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

The idea is that of covering them and so shielding and sparing them from destruction. God broods over the nations, feels their sorrows in His own heart, and desires to save them from destruction. Truly, that is the source of all the ministry of the prophets of old, and the source of all missionary endeavour to this day. *"Should not I have pity?"* There are many other lessons to be learnt from the book of the prophet Jonah, but surely this is its supreme lesson. Out of God's attitude of mercy, as illustrated here, all the activities of God proceed. God cannot be untrue to this central fact of His nature. That is why Peter exclaimed,

"The Lord is...longsuffering...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

This Book of Jonah surely says to all who know their Lord, to put away their exclusiveness and prejudice and go to the Ninevehs of our day with God's message of warning. Why? Because God has said, *"Should not I have pity?"*

MICAH

What Doth the LORD Require?



The name Micah means, “Who is like Jehovah”, and is abbreviated from Micaiah. Micah was a country prophet who lived in the days of Isaia] and Hosea. His home was about twenty mile south of Jerusalem in the town of MoreshethGath, in the range country near the Philistine border. His ministry covers a period of approximately fifty years during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (757-741), Ahaz (740-726), and Hezekiah (725-696) (See Micah 1:1).

Micah addresses his words to Samaria in Israel, and Jerusalem in Judah (Micah1:5), as well as to many towns in his own neighbourhood of southern Judah (Micah 1:10-15).

He has been variously named as:

- 1.Prophet of Judgment
- 2.Prophet of the Poor

These titles emphasize the chief burden of his message, for he tells how God must punish the corrupt rich and those in authority. In his day judges were unreliable, rulers were untrustworthy, and prophets were untruthful.

“The priests...teach for hire, and the prophets...divine for money: yet will they lean on the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us” (Micah 3:11).

Generally, mammonism and luxury were rampant in the cities. The architectural splendour of the cities cried to heaven, because the palaces of the privileged and rich cost the blood of the disinherited, the downtrodden, and the exploited poor. The story of Naboth’s vineyard illustrates their sins (Micah 2:2).

Israel’s Sin Denounced, and Judgment Predicted - Chs. 1-3

Chapters 1 to 3 of Micah are primarily concerned with his message of denunciation and punishment. The approaching ruin of Israel and Judah is predicted and the people and their leaders are sternly warned. (Micah1:3-9; 2:3-5; 3:1-4; 3:12).

Micah, however, is also a prophet of hope, and looks beyond the doom and punishment to the day of restoration after a time of great travail. He writes: *“BUT in the last days...”*(Micah 4:1).

Peace in the Last Days-Ch.4:1-5

Chapters 4 & 5 tell how God will bring back His people from exile and establish Israel as chief among the nations; God Jehovah shall reign over them, and there shall be peace and quiet in the whole earth.

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains... and people shall flow unto it.

And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up ... to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among many people...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation... ” (Micah 4:1-3)

Much of this passage is repeated in Isaiah 2:1-4. It refers to the last days when Christ will reign as King of kings over His millennial kingdom.

“The LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever” (Micah 4:7).

Israel’s King would be Born in Bethlehem and Rejected- Ch.5:2

However, before the Lord reigns He is to be rejected. Micah points to the Christ, David’s son, who should come from Bethlehem to be the rejected ruler in Israel. This was the prophecy that was used to direct the wise men in their search for the king of the Jews at the birth of Jesus.

“They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah ...out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5: 1-2).



Israel Given Up until the Time of Jacob's Travail - Ch.5:3

The consequence of Israel's rejection of her king is that she would be put aside until the time of Great Tribulation, when Israel will pass through travail before giving birth to a new nation that will be born "in a day".

"THEREFORE will he give them up, UNTIL the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel" (Micah 5:3).

Isaiah wrote:

"Shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth..." (Isa. 66:8).

Israel's rejection of her Messiah has resulted in centuries of dispersion, but after she experiences the new birth under the New Covenant during the Tribulation she will be gathered again to the Lord.

Israel Restored and her Enemies Judged Ch.7:7-20

In chapter 7:7-20 the prophecy continues and looks forward to Israel's restoration and judgment on her enemies. The repentant nation says,

"I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, UNTIL he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness" (Micah 7:9).

"The nations shall see and be confounded... they shall lick the dust... they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee (Israel)" (Micah 7:16-17).

***God is Compassionate and Will Keep His Covenants
Micah 7:18-20***

Why will God do these things for Israel? The answer, as always, is His faithfulness to His Word.

"Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou has sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (Micah 7:20).

God is a covenant-keeping God who cannot deny Himself, and for this reason Israel can be assured of ultimate victory and blessing. However, God is holy and cannot condone sin, and therefore much of Micah's prophecy deals with the sin of the nation which hinders the fulfilment of God's covenant blessing. Israel's ultimate blessing awaits her conversion when *"all Israel shall be saved"* (Rom.11:26).

The Twelve Minor Prophets

Perhaps the most vivid and valuable contribution Micah makes is in Micah 6:1-8 as a prophet of true religion. Elliott Binns says of this section that it is one of the greatest passages in all religious literature. We have a vindication of true religion as against soulless formalism, its shadow and curse.

I propose that we think upon this passage, chapter 6:1-8, for in doing so we will not only discover the burden of Micah's message, but clear direction as to what God requires of us.

The classical portrayal of true religion is introduced by a figure frequently employed in the Prophets, of a legal controversy between Jehovah and His people (Hosea 4:1; 12:2; Isa. 3:13; 43:26 and Jer. 25:31).

In Micah 6:1-2 the Lord calls the mountains and the foundations of the earth to witness, as He puts His strong argument against his disobedient people. Three things are to be noted in this section:

1. God's Argument Against Israel (Micah 6: 3 -5).
2. Israel's Vain Attempt To Gain God's Favour (Micah 6: 6 -7).
3. That Which Alone is Acceptable to God (Micah 6: 8).

1. God's Argument Against Israel Ch.6: 1-5.

God has a lawsuit or controversy that He would bring against His people. He has resolved to plead His own cause against them, and to that end they have been summoned to meet Him in the presence of the everlasting hills and the foundations of the earth. These silent witnesses of the events of the ages have looked upon the sins and sufferings of this people and will be full of memories. God would have the matter argued out between Him and His people.

Whilst the tone is that of a plaintiff prosecution, yet it sounds even more like the plaintive cry of a father, heart-broken and weeping over His disobedient children. Look at verse three,

"O my people," it starts. Pusey says,

"This one tender word twice repeated (see v. 5) contains in one a whole volume of reproof."

God asks them what He has done to make them tired of Him, to make them ignore and evade Him so. They owe their existence to His delivering act from Egypt;

"I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Micah 6:4).



God had given them prophets, priests and other leaders, but they had rebelled. God had frustrated the plan of Balak to destroy them by the curses of Balaam, and turned his curses into blessings.

But Israel is not alone in this! Oh the selfishness, ingratitude, carelessness and complacency of the people of God. God has a very similar complaint against His people in Malachi 1: 6, 12-14. Has the Lord a controversy with you?

2. Israel's Vain Attempt to Gain Favour with God; Israel's Proposal - Micah 6:6-7

These two verses constitute the answer to God's inquiry, "*What have I done unto thee?*"(v3). They have been interpreted mainly in two different ways, as expressing two opposing reactions on the part of the people.

i) They are yet rebellious and indignant. They are willing to offer costly sacrifices if these would blind God to their lack of repentance, contrition, love, obedience, reverence and respect.

ii) OR it is suggested the words portray the people as conscience smitten. They appeal in desperation what sacrifice they can make to God that will make amends for their sin.

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" (Vs 6).

Then the anxious enquirer suggests pagan ways of approach that he is willing to carry out if only God will accept (Micah 6: 6-7). He cried,

"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (v.7b).

Whatever is the tone of man's reply to God's complaint, it is obvious that outward observances are worthless when not backed by moral and spiritual devotion and dedication.

It was to this vain attempt on Israel's part to get back into God's favour that the prophet brought the magnificent summary statement of verse eight.

***3. The Prophet States that which is Acceptable to God
Micah 6: 8.***

Notice that the verse says, "*He hath shewed thee...what doth the Lord require...?*" God does require something of sinful man. He is man's Creator and Lord, and has a right to require something.

The Twelve Minor Prophets

Rebellious man is in great debt. God does not pass over transgressions lightly. They had earlier been shown what God required, quoting from the law:

“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deut.10:12).

We ought to reflect again that God is not requiring burnt offerings, *“thousands of rams or...rivers of oil”*, nor the *“firstborn”*, the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul (Micah 6:7); none of these things would have any value to bring a sinful rebellious soul back into God’s grace. Goodness is then revealed in the words,

“to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

In this we discover first, true repentance, moral and human responsibility and relationship, doing justly and loving mercy, and second, life is seen in its spiritual and divine responsibility and relationship, *“walking humbly with God.”*

When that is done, the first two follow inevitably, ie doing justly and loving mercy. We will consider them in the order in which we find them in the text.

Goodness is *“doing justly”*. The word so rendered comes from a great Hebrew word *“mishpat”*, which ultimately means justice. Justice requires first of all a righteous moral standard, secondly the finding of a true verdict, thirdly coming to a right decision, and finally action in harmony with these things.

Then we have the second suggestion in the words, *“to love mercy.”* The word for mercy is a great word, *“che’ced”*, representing the idea of stooping, bending, serving; all activity created by love.

These two moral responsibilities are the essence of living for God, and were so applicable to Micah’s day, for herein Israel had erred greatly. Jehovah is the God of unchanging justice and mercy, and His subjects must share these traits to be well pleasing to Him.

If a man is to enjoy God’s favour he must turn from his sins. He must lose himself and be born again. Then it is, in this surrender of the self-life to God, this humbling of self and walking with Him, that we are changed by His mercy and we come to full

realization of what He requires. He receives the humble. He renews the humble, and He makes possible in him what He (God) requires.

It is interesting that when Jesus summed up this same matter in Matthew 23:23, He used the words, *“judgment, mercy and faith.”* He thus equated *“faith”* with *“walking humbly with thy God”*, and that is an apt comparison.

When Israel is thus humbled and by faith casts herself upon God, they will then discover to be wonderfully true that sublime description of God with which the prophet closes his message.

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, 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. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou has sworn unto our fathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

The prophetic significance of this message is that when Israel turns from her sin and genuinely seeks the Lord, God will have mercy and fulfil His covenant promises to them. Only then,

“The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf...they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee (Israel)” (Micah 7:16).

AMOS

Demise and Ultimate Blessing of the Northern Kingdom of Israel



Amos is thought to be among the earliest of the prophetic writings. He prophesied about 760 BC while Uzziah was on the throne of Judah, and Jeroboam II reigned in Israel. The old boundaries of the earlier kingdom of David were recovered and money poured in while armies were victorious (2 Chron.26:2-16; 2 Kings 14:25-27). Assyria was not yet a conquering world power and the idea of approaching doom to Israel, which Amos forecast and which occurred within fifty years, seemed utterly improbable. They were enjoying peace, surrounding nations were not strong enough to trouble them (Amos 6:1-13), pleasures occupied their thoughts, and the rich oppressed the poor (Amos 2:6-8; 5:11-12; 6:4-6).

To arouse Israel to a sense of their danger, God sent the courageous prophet Amos with a message of warning, saying such things as, *"Woe to them that....trust in the mountain of Samaria"* (Amos 6:1).

Amos begins his prophecy against Damascus *"because they...threshed Gilead"*(Amos1:3); against Gaza and Tyre *"because they carried (Israel) away captive...to Edom"*(as slaves) (Amos1:6,9); against Edom, *"because he did pursue his brother (Israel) with the sword, and did cast off all pity"*(Amos1:11); against Ammon, *"because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead"*(Amos1:13); and against Moab *"because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime"* (Amos2:1).

Coming to Judah, he denounced the nation *"because they have despised the law of the LORD"* (Amos 2:4), and finally he dealt with the northern kingdom of Israel, *"because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes"*(Amos 2:6).

It is noticeable that as long as Amos was denouncing surrounding nations he was popular, but when he spoke directly to Israel, he was challenged; the priest Amaziah protested to Jeroboam the king, and Amos was advised to return to Judah.

Amos' message had a twofold significance.

- i) It revealed the fact that God maintains His government over all nations; Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, etc.

ii) It also revealed the supreme fact that the responsibility of all nations is created by the measure of their privilege.

He said nothing to any nation of such severity as the words He addressed to Israel. The divine wrath in fulness was reserved for the nation of principal privilege. So it is that we note that Amos was principally a prophet to Israel.

The prophecy is in four parts:

1. Judgment on Nations Surrounding Israel- Ch 1 to 2:3
2. Judgment on Judah and Israel- Ch 2:4-16
3. Jehovah's Controversy with all Israel- Ch 3:1 to 9:10
4. The Future Glory of the Davidic Kingdom - Ch 9:11-15



Because of the extensiveness of the subject matter of the prophecy, we can only generalize on a few main aspects in this study. We will consider:

1. The Man
2. His Message
3. God's Mercy

1. The Man

Amos was of Tekoa, a small town about six miles south of Bethlehem and twelve miles south of Jerusalem. His prophecy was delivered at Bethel in the northern kingdom of Israel; Bethel being the main centre of idolatrous worship in the time of Jeroboam. Amos was a layman in the language of today. He was a sheep herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. He must have been educated, for his book shows literary skill. This is one of the many instances of God calling a man while he was occupied with his daily work.

Amos has been called the "Trouble-maker from Tekoa". His God-given message of righteousness and judgment was unpalatable. He brushed with Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, and was told to go home. Amaziah would tell us, he should have been preaching, "How to sin and be happy".

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Amos' sermons were not niceties to give no offence. He did not take the cutting edge out of the Word of the Lord. He spoke of the sins of other nations, but he did not stop at the borders of Israel. He could not denounce evil at a distance and see none close at hand. Thirty-seven times he reminded them, *"Thus saith the Lord"*. He bothered not about vain philosophies and rational subtleties.

There is, unfortunately, a vague indefiniteness about "what the Lord saith" today. The Church today is looking for scholars, specialists, socialisers, showmen and strategists, while what we really need is preachers fresh from God - like Amos.

When Amaziah challenged him, he gave his unquestionable credentials. Like Paul, Amos conferred not with flesh and blood. No council of men validated his commission. It is doubtful if he would find an approving Church Council today.

Amos says he was not a prophet by profession:

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit."

He was a prophet by providence:

"And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos7:14-15).

What better credentials does any man need!

Nobody from one of the schools of the prophets would do this kind of preaching so God picked and trained an outsider, a rustic who had never learned the subtle and fine art of almost saying something - the trick of talking through both sides of his mouth. He was God's man, who had no axe to grind either in politics or religion, who knew no better than to say directly what others covered up with the alibi that it would not be tactful nor diplomatic. Nevertheless, within fifty years the judgments which Amos foretold came to pass.

All sorts of arguments are advanced against Amos' type of preaching today. A thin-skinned generation has been pampered so long that it will not hear. The question will be asked, "What good will it do?" Public approval and response is not the test of the message; the main thing is they know that God has spoken.

Ezekiel was obedient to the Lord in this regard, read Ezek.33:7-11. Isaiah preached a message that only blinded eyes, deafened ears and hardened hearts. Our Lord and Paul referred to this to explain the poor response of their generation. Today, the preacher who tries

to arouse the Church need not be surprised if he gets from the hands of unregenerate churchmen the same treatment that Amos and Paul received.

Dr Vance Havner, writing about Amos' type of preaching for today, says:

"Such preaching will not build up a crowd, but the business of the preacher is to fill the pulpit, not the pews. Nowhere in the New Testament is the size of the crowd the criterion of good preaching. Our Lord sometimes preached His crowd away (John 6:66). It is not our business to make the message acceptable, but to make it available."

2. The Message

The Book of Amos reveals a composite of messages that he delivered in Israel, and we can only summarize.

a) Sin is Denounced

Notice his introduction:

"The Lord will roar from Zion, and ...the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither" (Amos 1:2).

That is a scorcher! He has their attention now. Then he says of Damascus, *"I will send a fire into the house of Hazael"* (Amos 1:4). He might have got an "Amen" there, but he continues to name others who are under the same condemnation. Their interest rises until he mentions Judah, and as he condemns her, their hearts pound with unabated joy.

If he had stopped there, he would have been a popular preacher in Israel. You find your popularity rising if you talk about the sins of other people and leave the sins of the locals alone. But Amos had aroused their attention. He comes now to the body of his message. He condemns in the most scathing terms, the sins of the northern kingdom of Israel. Read Ch 2:6-8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:21-27 and 6:1-8.

Israel was a luxury loving, leisure seeking, sensual, drunken nation, worshipping the idols of Moloch and Chiun (5:26) and at the same time making pretence by ceremony of acknowledging Jehovah (Amos 5:21-24). We see many professing Christians in the same danger today. They think that by their formal "churchianity" they are conferring favours on God and therefore He cannot condemn them.

b) Judgment is Certain

Amos tells Israel they are blind to the storm clouds gathering. Hear Amos in some of his unique figures of speech: *"Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow"* (Amos 2:15). Jeroboam's archers were accustomed to press forward against the enemy, they never gave in. What foolish talk of Amos to suggest they would fail to stand. Amos says, *"He that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself."* Israel's soldiers never run away from the battle!

"Neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself," thunders the prophet. There were no horsemen in all the world like Jeroboam's invincible cavalry. But the climax is reached in chapter 3:12:

"Thus saith the Lord; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria..."

This sounded like mockery; the idea of powerful Israel being likened to fragments of an eaten sheep! Yet in less than fifty years Israel was destroyed and the remnant of her people were like the leg of a sheep taken from the jaw of a devourer. Such is the picture of God's abhorrence of sin. Let Amos help you to see sin in its true light. If men reject the repeated warnings of God, they must be punished.

In chapter 6:7-11 Amos sees in imagination the long line of captives of Israel led away in judgment. Misery will replace their mirth; slavery will replace their idleness. So great shall be the destruction and slaughter, that *"if ten men (remain) in one house"* to escape the sword, they shall die. *"A man's uncle shall... bring out the bones"*. *"The great house"* and *"the little house"* shall not escape (Amos 6:11).

In chapters 7-9 Amos receives two visions concerning impending judgment. They are the "Plumbline", and the "Fruit Basket." In chapter 7:7-11, Amos sees God measuring the city for destruction. The measuring revealed how far out of line Israel was; too far for repair or amendment. In Amos 8:1-3, Israel is seen as a basket of over-ripe summer fruit, rotten and soon to perish. The guilty nation is ripe for judgment.

One final vision shows God standing upon the altar and bidding Amos to break the doorpost and shower the fragments over the people - symbolic that all the worshippers are to be scattered or slain by the sword. The visions end with judgment, but God is careful to state the just reason for carrying out this judgment.

"All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us " (Amos 9:10).

Is not this the complacent cry of our day? As men multiply iniquity and increase violence, they are surprised that any should call it sin and suggest that God will come in judgment.

3. God's Mercy

Now Israel did not like Amos' type of preaching. It was the true Word of the Lord and sharper than any two-edged sword. Amaziah, the priest of the king's chapel in Bethel, objected and wanted to run Amos out of town, and many authorities say he succeeded. Amos was not popular with the people. They did not like what he said.

It is the same today. The unregenerate like their sins too much to give them up. Call Amos what you will- prophet of righteousness, or troublemaker from Tekoa, but he had a real burden from God and a concern for men. Walker says of Amos:

"If he had a tongue like a whip for the oppressor, it spoke out of a heart of love for the oppressed. He was fierce because he was loving. His prophecy is molten metal heated in the furnace of pity."

Look, for example, at chapter 4:6-13, where he graciously reminds Israel of Jehovah's fatherly chastisement. He caused famine and drought hoping that they would be wise and repent, but verse 5b says, "*yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.*"

He sent pestilence into their gardens and orchards, hoping that they might return unto the Lord, but we read, "*yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord*" (Amos 4:9).

He sent the sword and destruction among them, but we read:

"I have overthrown some of you, as ...Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet ye have not returned unto me" (Amos 4:10-11).

God's passionate concern reaches its peak in chapter five, where the Lord is seen pleading with them. Verse one says,

"Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, a house of Israel" (Amos 5:1).

Then in Amos 5:1-15, as He looks in pity upon her sinful and helpless estate, God pleads for her in the words, "*Seek ye me, and ye shall live*" (V.4); "*Seek the LORD, and ye shall live*" (V.6); "*Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion.. The LORD is his name*"(V.8). His impassioned pleadings are summed up in verses 14-15.

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“Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live..Bate the evil, and love the good...it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph “ (Amos 5:14-15).

These are the words of a heart of love and mercy, and not the gloating of a heartless haranguer. Amos only wants to bring them to repentance before it is too late, not to harass and annoy them.

The burden of Amos’ loving concern for Israel is further displayed in a series of passionate intercessions in chapter 7:1-6. The Lord showed Amos in two separate visions that He must judge His people. In verses one and two there is the vision of the ravages of a locust plague, and in verse four of a violent destructive fire. In each instance Amos successfully pleads with God not to do these terrible things to Israel. He prays, *“O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.”* Because of the sincerity of Amos’ prayer for mercy, the Lord repented for this and said, *“It shall not be,”* in verses 3 & 6 of chapter 7.

In spite of God’s forbearance and the prophet’s intercession, Israel went into destruction. God, who had pleaded with them, had reluctantly let them go their own way. The Great Physician had looked inside and said, *“It is too late now.”*

vWhat lessons this teaches us! May we submit our lives and our people to the Lord before He has to say, *“You came too late. If only you had called on me sooner.”* Come let us *“return unto the Lord...to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”*(Isa.55:7).

Significantly, though the nation is doomed, a remnant will recover. The Lord will not utterly destroy, but *“will sift the house of Israel among all nations”,* and in the Last Days God will *“raise up the tabernacle of David...and close up the breaches thereof”* (Amos 9:11. See also Acts 15:16).

Finally, the Lord will bring the residue of His people back to Zion and restore His kingdom blessings.

“I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities....and they shall plant vineyards...and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land”(Amos 9:14-15).

In the Last Days the “ten lost tribes” will return and be blessed.

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt” (Amos 9:13).

HOSEA

Redeeming Love



Concerning the prophet Hosea we have a small fund of information, all of it derived from the book which bears his name. He was the son of Beer and a native of the northern kingdom or "ten tribes" of Israel. His activity as a prophet is thought to have extended over a period of about sixty years during the eighth century before Christ. It began in the reign of Jeroboam II about 782 BC, and continued for some years after that monarch's death in 743 BC.

Hosea's prophetic activity fell within a critical period of Israel's history. It was a very unsettled time and sin was rampant. The golden age of Jeroboam was passing, and a dark cloud hung over Israel. On the death of Jeroboam six kings followed in quick succession, and about the middle of Hosea's ministry many of the nation were carried away by the Assyrians into captivity. Soon after Hosea's death the kingdom of Israel came to an end with the fall of Samaria (721BC).

Hosea had a very sad home life because of an unfaithful wife. This becomes a divine parable for Israel as Jehovah's adulterous wife, repudiated yet loved dearly, and though she must be judged for her sin, the divine Husband will yet purify her and restore her. God said,

"Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms.. for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD" (Hos.1:2).

This book is in three parts:

- A. The Dishonoured Wife - Israel's Unfaithfulness (Chapters 1- 3)
- B. The Sinful People - Israel's Sin and Chastisement (Chapters 4 -10)
- C. Israel's Ultimate Hope and Restoration (Chapters 11 - 14)

As we look at this prophecy, we may briefly summarize by declaring that it gives:

1. God's Attitude towards Sin.
2. God's Activity in Judgment upon Sin.
3. God's Love for the Sinner.

Three words indicate the main prophetic lesson of Hosea: sin, judgment, and love.

1. What, Then, Does Hosea Teach Us Concerning Sin?

First and foremost, that the sin of a people of high privilege is the most heinous of which humanity is capable. That was the sin of Israel and Judah. God had loved them and had lavished His love upon them, but they had answered that love with infidelity. It is noticeable that in this prophecy certain vulgar forms of sin seem hardly to be mentioned. They are referred to, but are employed in a moral and spiritual sense. Deeper down than any of the sins which are physical, is the infidelity to love.

In the case of Israel, it was the sin of a people who had been loved by Jehovah, found by Jehovah, and brought out of Egyptian captivity by Jehovah (Hosea 11:1). They were a people whom God had taught to walk, and had taken them in His arms and loved them with a love surpassing the love of a woman. In spite of this, they had been unfaithful to their covenant with Him.

Hosea had learned the meaning of Israel's sin against Jehovah's love by his own broken heart. His own home life had been destroyed, and he had passed through the intolerable agony created by the infidelity of Gomer, the wife whom he loved. Through that experience he had learned what sin really means, and that is why he adopted the strangely arresting and vulgar words to describe sin as adultery and harlotry.

The sin of adultery is that of seeking satisfaction in unlawful relations. Harlotry goes further, and is that of prostituting high possessions for the sake of vain hire and gain. These metaphorically were Israel's sins. As the prophet declared, God had met them, loved them, taught them to walk, carried them in His arms, yet they had gone after other gods (Hosea 11:1-3). Perhaps the supreme revelation at this point is that of God's attitude toward such sin.

- i) The first fact is that it caused suffering to the heart of God. It was an abuse of, and a blow at love.
- ii) The second fact is that the holiness of God made condoning of such sin impossible.

The picture therefore is graphic and terrible, but it was the truth concerning these people. They had slighted the law of God and consequently violated His love. God said:

"I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms... Therefore...I will hedge up thy way with thorns...! will also cause all her mirth to cease" (Hosea 2:4,6,11).

Israel had turned from Him and had done despite to His love as they had played the harlot with Baalim. The result primarily was that God had suffered. Nevertheless there could be no condoning of sin and no compromise with it. God's attitude toward sin, we thus learn, is ever that of measuring it by its failure to respond to privilege.

We hear oftentimes in conversation, references to little sins and big sins. There is a sense in which any such distinction is entirely unwarranted; yet there is another sense in which it is true, and if we take the national outlook that Hosea was talking about, the sin of the people of privilege is far more terrible than that of people who have not had privilege.

It were far better to have been born in the heart of Africa and never heard about God, than to have been born in a Christian home and brought up in church if we are untrue to God.

This great prophecy then, with its sob and its sigh, teaches us that God suffers when we treat Him as Gomer had treated Hosea.

2. What Does Hosea Teach Us Concerning Judgment on Sin?

There can be no compromise with sin and no condoning of it. Therefore we find, as clearly revealed in Hosea, the fact not only of God's attitude toward sin but that of His inevitable activity in judgment. Throughout this prophecy there are passages vibrant with the thunder of divine wrath. In fact the bulk of Hosea is pronouncement of judgment, especially chapters eight and nine.

The religious instincts of the people had been perverted; there was no knowledge of God in the land (Hosea 4:1). As children of a harlot, her people are incapable of real repentance. Their national life is corrupt through and through so there is one inevitable and just punishment, and that is that Israel must be swept away out of the land and be deprived of king and priest, sacrifice and law. She cannot dwell in the Lord's house while her heart is not the Lord's. Read chapter 9:15-17. They are to be cast out and to suffer exile as wanderers among the nations.

Nevertheless, in the light of this prophecy we discover that God's punishment of sin is never capricious. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; rather is His punishment the irrevocable outworking of sin itself. God has so constituted the universe that we cannot escape from such results. *"Be not deceived; God is not*

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mocked: for whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal.6:7). Punishment is inevitably included in the course of sin, and this is the clear teaching of Hosea. See Hosea 8:7,11 and 10:13.

However, God never abandons man at that point, and as we listen to Hosea and recognize that God's government compels the outworking of sin to the final issue, there is yet much, much more to be said. There can be no escape. When the psalmist enquired, "*Whither shall I flee from thy presence?*" (Ps 139:7), the complete answer is found in the declaration that it cannot be done. There is no place where God is not, and where His government is not in force. Man's experience of that government will necessarily differ.

A man can rebel against God. He can fight back to his own hurt like one flinging himself against God's sword and shield, and so be broken to pieces, or He can shelter in God's arm and be shielded from all harm.

By His universal government God is ever compelling man to work out to its ultimate issue his thinking, his choosing, his philosophy. "*Who is this?*" Asks Isaiah as he looked upon the Warrior Messiah, "*I that speak in righteousness...I have trodden the winepress alone..for the day of vengeance is in mine heart*" (Isa.63:1-4).

He was treading the winepress, ie compelling the grapes to yield up their own life and their own nature and fruits. God is ever doing this, and He is doing it with the nations today. Man is being compelled to work out to its ultimate conclusion his own sowing, his philosophies and choices.

Judgment as punishment is never a delight to God; it is not really His desire. The penalties of sin are as irrevocable as are the blessings of righteousness.

Hosea's message of judgment for His people is that judgment is purposeful. His conception of divine punishment on Israel is that of a discipline, and not that of an irrevocable ruin. His message does not end in a hopeless prospect of unrelieved gloom. God's punishment of Israel is not intended to destroy but to heal, to purge, to purify. The doom of Israel is certain, because Jehovah in justice cannot spare them, their offences have been too manifest; but beyond their doom lies a great hope, the hope of restoration when they shall have learnt the lesson which He is teaching them. God says,

"I will betroth thee unto me for ever... in righteousness...in judgment...in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:19).

This doctrine of the restoration of Israel after the discipline of suffering is manifest in the story of Hosea and his wife, and runs like a red thread through the whole book (See Ch.3:1-5; 2:14-23; 5:15). Canon GH Box says:

The doom pronounced is irreversible, the state must come to an end. But the people are not to be annihilated. They are to suffer exile; cast out of the Lord's house (Hosea 3:4; 9:17). They are to be set back to the same conditions in which they were at first when Yahweh made them a nation. The doom is from Yahweh and has a disciplinary purpose. In exile the people shall learn to give up their reliance on foreign powers and false worship. Then the relationship between them and Yahweh shall be reestablished.

It is out of this thought of the purpose in chastisement from God that we can learn our third and best lesson from Hosea.

3. What does Hosea Teach Us Concerning Love?

And now we come to this supreme fact that all the way through we hear the appeal of the love of God. That really is the dominant note of Hosea's message. This love of God was unveiled to Hosea through his own marital tragedy. Gomer had deceived him, had been unfaithful to him and had left him bereft, and his heart was broken as she had gone after her false lovers.

The historic story then reveals the fact that Gomer's lovers had forsaken her and she had been reduced to the position of a harlot slave. While in that condition Hosea was commanded to seek her, and in order to gain her, he had to buy her as a slave (Hosea 3:2). In doing that he opened "a door of hope" for her in "the valley of Achor" (Hosea 2:15; Josh.7:26).

The word "Achor" signifies troubling, and so the "door of hope" was opened in the valley of troubling. Through this personal experience God was revealing to Hosea what He was prepared to do with a people that had been guilty of spiritual adultery and harlotry. It is a love song that surpasses all human understanding. God too will ransom and redeem this harlot slave and restore her unto Himself.

Look now at chapter eleven, which tells of God's eternal love for Israel. He loved her from the beginning, and verse four says, "*I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.*" Christ did this for us, drawing us with cords of a man when He became a man and died for us. He said, "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all*

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men unto me" (John 12:32). God has agonized over His rebellious people in the days of their unfaithfulness and will not give them up.

Ephraim, in infinite scorn has been described as a "*cake not turned*" (Hosea 7:8), doughy and uncooked on one side but burnt to a cinder on the other - entirely unpalatable. Nevertheless, we hear the cry of divine love,

"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hosea 11: 8).

And the answer is,

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4).

Thus we listen to a veritable anthem of love out of the heart of God.

Prophetically, Hosea's message is of present day significance for Israel. Hosea 9:17 describes the condition of the Jew today "*wanderers among the nations*", but God in love tells this people in chapter 1:10-11 that though they were cast off as "*not a people*", yet ultimately He will bless them.

"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" (Hosea 1:10).

God foretells that one day Judah and Israel shall be gathered together and have one head.

"Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God...in the latter days"(Hosea 3:5).

God will do more than forgive their backsliding. He will cure and heal them, and remove the cause of their backsliding. In chapter 14:1-3 He appeals to Israel to return and repent, and in 14:4-8 He talks of promised future blessing for them after their return.

We should note, however, that Hosea has a message for all men. Chapter fourteen especially is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible for backsliders. Read verse four. God's great heart is bursting with love. Only our refusal keeps Him from telling us all that is there. As with Israel, the repentant one may know the joy of all barriers broken down and love poured into the life. Verse five says, "*I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily.*" The dew speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and shows how God pictures His abiding joy in His people after they are ransomed and healed.

These are the permanent notes of this great message of Hosea, and it is well that we remember that in spite of this final thought of the love of God we must not emphasize one note apart from the others and so minimize the value of the whole. If we listen to the love song and forget the declaration of judgment, we are false to God. If we emphasize the fact of judgment and forget the love song, we blaspheme against God.

Sin in the last analysis, in its most terrible form, is infidelity to love. It hurts God. It destroys the sinner. God can never condone sin, but He can and does redeem the sinner, and as the epilogue in chapter 14:9 declares: *“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?”*



History of Inter-captivity Period 721 to 586BC

The one hundred and fifty years prior to the destruction of Nineveh (612 BC) saw a power struggle in the ancient world. Egypt and Assyria were vying for control of the nations. Between the two great powers lay the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah and it was inevitable that these should be drawn into the conflict.

Between 770 and 760 BC Assyrian armies led by Tiglathpileser III (also called Pul) came against the northern kingdom of Israel and Menahem, who ruled in Samaria, paid him money to confirm the kingdom in his hands (2Kings15:19-20). Tiglathpileser took the money and returned.

About 740 BC in the days of Ahaz king of Judah, Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel invaded Judah. Ahaz called for help from Tiglathpileser, offering to be his servant and sending a present out of the treasures of the Temple and the king's house. Tiglathpileser obliged by capturing Damascus. Rezin was killed and the Syrians were taken captive (2Kings 16:5-9).

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About 723 BC Shalmaneser V came into the northern kingdom of Israel and began a siege of Samaria in the seventh year of King Hoshea. It lasted till the ninth year of his reign; a period of about two years during which Shalmaneser was replaced by Sargon II, who finally captured the city in 721BC taking most of the ten northern tribes captive to Assyria. He "put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings 18:11).

Following the downfall of Samaria, Hezekiah endeavoured to reunite the two kingdoms. A Passover was kept and "posts" were sent with letters to the remnant of all Israel from Dan to Beersheba, urging them to repent and to keep the feast. Some laughed, but many came and celebrated at Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30).

It was after this that the Assyrians, led by Sennacherib, returned and pushed south into Judah (2 Chron. 32). Most of Judah was overrun and its cities taken (Isa. 36:1-2). Only Jerusalem held out, and Rabshakeh was sent from Lachish to convince the people not to trust in Hezekiah or the LORD. The siege of Jerusalem was interrupted for a while when it was rumoured that Tirhakah king of Ethiopia had arrived to fight the Assyrians, but this appeared to be nothing more than a rumour (Isaiah 37:9).

Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet sought the LORD, and God sent His angel into the camp of the Assyrians; in one night 185,000 Assyrians died. That was in 713 BC, which was the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18:13).

Sennacherib returned home to Nineveh, and while worshipping in the house of his god was murdered by two of his sons.

Another of his sons, Esarhaddon (680-669BC), reigned and invaded Egypt conquering the Nile Delta, while his son Assurbanipal invaded the south of Egypt (663 BC) and destroyed Thebes (called No or No-Amon). Nahum made reference to this event when prophesying of the destruction of Nineveh (Nahum 3:8). To reach Egypt, the Assyrian armies would pass through the land of Judah.

Assyria, however, was finding it difficult to hold her territories, and in 650BC withdrew from Egypt to face a revolt by the Babylonians and attacks of the Scythians from the north. The Scythians were pouring through the Caucasus mountain passes into the Euphrates valley.

Philip's World History - People, Dates and Events, Page 16 states:

"Scythian peoples from the steppes began raiding the Middle East

about 650BC" (Magogites were named Scythians by the Greeks according to Josephus, *Antiquities* Book I, Ch.VI page 81).

In August 612 BC Nineveh was finally destroyed in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. God's instrument of judgment was an alliance of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians.

With Assyria broken, Pharaoh-nechoh passed through Judah (609BC) on his way to Carchemish on the Euphrates. Josiah went out to fight with him and was fatally wounded at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29). On Pharaoh-nechoh's return he removed Jehoahaz from the throne of Judah, placed the land under tribute, and installed Jehoiakim as a vassal king to Egypt.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, (Jer.46:2 - 606 BC) Pharaoh-nechoh again took his army to Carchemish to fight Nebuchadnezzar's army, and was defeated. The Babylonians then came to Jerusalem and Jehoiakim became a servant to the Babylonians. Daniel and his friends were among the "*king's seed, and princes*"(Dan.1:3) taken to Babylon at this time. It was the first of three captivities and Jeremiah described those taken as "*a basket of good figs*" removed "*for their good*" (Jer.24:1,5). The final captivity was a "*basket of evil figs*" removed "*for their hurt*" (Jer.24:9).

Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years and then revolted (2 Kings 24:1). During the last four years of his eleven-year reign, God sent the Syrians, bands of Chaldeans, Moabites and Ammonites to weaken the nation. Jehoiakim could not appeal to Egypt for help because Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the lands from the Euphrates to the Nile and Pharaoh was rendered powerless (2 Kings 24:7).

The Babylonians again invaded Judah, and Jehoiakim was put in chains to be taken to Babylon but never made it. His body was cast out of the city of Jerusalem and his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, reigned for three months before surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar and being taken to Babylon. There he was kept in prison for 37 years, after which Evil-merodach exalted him above all other kings in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27; Jer.52:31).

Zedekiah was Jehoiachin's uncle, and he reigned for eleven years. However, he foolishly rebelled, and on his ninth year Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged Jerusalem until the eleventh year (586 BC). Zedekiah tried to escape but was caught and taken to Riblath where he was tried. He saw his sons slain before his eyes were put out, and he was taken in chains to Babylon, where he died in prison.

NAHUM

"The LORD...reserveth wrath for his enemies"



In Nahum we meet a new type of prophecy. The earlier prophets announced the coming judgment on Israel, while Nahum sounds the death knell of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, had besieged Samaria about 723BC, and Sargon completed its destruction in 721BC. Israel, the northern kingdom, had been threatened continuously for about fifty years since the days of Pul, the king of Assyria (2 Kings 15:19), but now in Nahum's day Judah was in grave peril by reason of this same cruel oppressor.

Nahum's name was suggestive of the type of message he had to deliver to Judah. It means "Consoler", or "Comforter", and he had a message of exceeding comfort for Judah.

"Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off"
(Nahum 1:15)

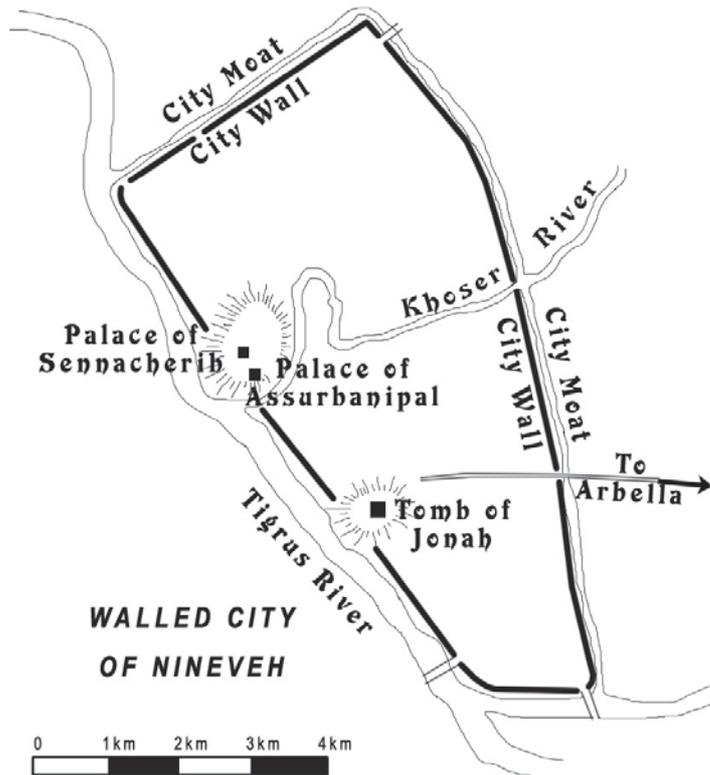
The time for Nineveh's overthrow is ripe for, as Nahum 2:2 tells us, Jacob and Israel have been sufficiently chastised, and now the Assyrian rod of chastisement, having done its work, is to be thrown into the fire. To a people in a condition of oppression and fear, Nahum utters this startling and remarkable prediction that Nineveh the terrible, the proud, the merciless, would be utterly destroyed.

Under the preaching of Jonah the city and its king had repented (Jonah 3:3-10), but in the time of Nahum, more than a century later, the city had wholly apostatised from God and was ripe for judgment. The message of Nahum, uttered about fifty years before the destruction of Nineveh, leaves no opportunity for further repentance for that wicked city; for there is no remedy for apostasy but utter destruction.

"He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time"(Nahum 1:9).

Nahum's prophecy therefore was not a call to repentance but the statement of certain final and justified doom. As Nahum 1:3 says, *"The Lord is slow to anger."* Since Jonah's visit to Nineveh and its repentance God had waited over one hundred years, but Nineveh had forgotten her repentance and continued in her course of godlessness and cruelty, so now God must act in vengeance.

The Prophecy of Nahum



Nahum was presumably a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk. He prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah. According to Nahum 3:8-10, this prophecy was uttered after a great overthrow of the ancient Egyptian city of No, or No-Amon, the ancient city of Thebes. This magnificent city was devastated by Assurbanipal of Assyria in 663BC.

The destruction of Nineveh which Nahum prophesied occurred in 612BC,

following a two-year siege by the Medes and their king, Cyaxares. So clearly Nahum's prophecy must be dated somewhere between 663BC and 612BC.

The permanent value of this prophecy is that it sets before the mind, as no other book in the divine library does, the picture of the wrath of Jehovah. The tendency of our day is either to deny, or to shrink entirely from any reference to that aspect of truth concerning God. Therefore one comes to this book with an added sense of solemnity, and with a very sincere and earnest desire to discover what Nahum teaches.

A simple analysis of this book shows us two aspects of the one great vision which the book contains.

1. A Vision of God - chapter 1
2. A Vision of the Wrath of God in Action - chapters 2 and 3

A Vision of God - Chapter 1

Each of the Old Testament prophets had a distinct vision of God, suited to the message which they had to deliver, and we only know anything approaching the full revelation of God as we see the merging of these various visions into that one majestic Being. Isaiah saw God on His throne as the embodiment of holiness and grace. Ezekiel saw Him as the Almighty Spirit in the symbolism of turning wheels and living creatures. Nahum, however, sees God in His overwhelming anger.

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Within the compass of verses two and six Nahum uses seven different Hebrew words to describe this aspect of God's nature. It is arresting to our finite comprehension to note that the prophet has used practically every word about anger which can be found in the Hebrew Bible. This fact surely subdues our spirits and compels us to look carefully at God's nature as revealed in these expressions.

i.) *"God is jealous"* (v. 2). This describes the wrath of God subjectively. It is how God feels within Himself toward those who have done despite to His patience and love. The word suggests an intense emotional distress.

ii) *"The Lord revengeth"* (v. 2). This word tells us that God, having been emotionally distressed by Nineveh's apostasy, must judge and mete out retribution. This is the wrath of God in an active volitional aspect. It is not that God is peeved as man might be, and would get His own back by retaliation, but rather that He must punish this recalcitrant nation.

iii) *"He reserveth wrath for His enemies"* (v. 2). The Hebrew root of this word "wrath" means to "cross over" from one side or position to another, therefore this word reminds us that God is primarily a God of mercy and forgiveness. He does not delight in destroying the wicked, but there is a time when certain conditions, like the apostasy of Nineveh, demand that He cross over in attitude and activity from mercy to punishment, from tenderness and compassion to wrath and penalty.

iv) *"Who can stand before His indignation"* (v. 6). Here we are introduced to that aspect of the wrath of God which is formidable and terrifying; it is wrath expressed in activity.

v) *"Who can abide the fierceness?"* (v. 6). This word means burning, and adds intensity to the idea of God's wrath.

vi) *"Who can abide the fierceness of his anger?"* (v. 6). The root meaning of this Hebrew word is that of "hard-breathing", and can best be illustrated by that image from the animal world when an enraged beast is foaming at the mouth.

vii) *"His fury is poured out like fire"* (v. 6). This suggests the idea of heat and a burning intensity of wrath.

Truly, Nahum has introduced us to that other side of God's nature which sinful mankind is reluctant to think about. Isaiah wrote that judgment was God's *"strange work...his strange act"* (Isa.28:21, and we need to respect the truth that our God of love and mercy has to

maintain the principles of righteousness and justice. As a man sows, so shall he reap. There comes a time when God has to cross over, or change His attitude, because men and nations continue to rebel and will not repent. Thus God is left with no other choice than to act in wrath.

*A Vision of the Wrath of God in Action
Chapters 2 and 3.*

These remaining two chapters foretell exactly what God in His wrath did actually do to the Assyrian nation and its illustrious city of Nineveh. Nahum here revealed what was the Divine attitude towards Nineveh, and predicted the actions whereby it should be blotted out.

i) The prophet is careful to express the reason for the wrath of God taking such action. That reason is articulated in several passages in the prophecy. For example:

“There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor” (Nahum 1;11).

That seems to be a direct historic reference to their king, Sennacherib, but he is seen as the embodiment of the sins of all Nineveh and the nation of Assyria. See 2 Chron.32:10-19. Then we are told they had sinned against mankind in cruel carnage and oppression:

“The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts “ (Nahum 2:12-13).

In the third chapter further reasons for God’s wrath are revealed.

“Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not...Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts “ (Nahum 3:1, 4-5).

What a dreadful indictment is thus made by the prophet! However, history records it to be absolutely true. These sins are all inter-related. A proud people, rebelling against the Lord, replace Him with idolatry and witchcraft. Likewise they become heartless and cruel in their treatment of humanity. This inter-relation is inevitable and invariable. We are therefore left in no doubt as to the reason for God acting in vengeance against Nineveh. He was merely defending His divine authority and His holy laws. He was also acting in the interests and defence of those who were oppressed and stricken by wicked Nineveh.

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ii) The Prophet also tells us how God will act in wrath against Nineveh. He reveals God's methods of action. Many references to terrible warfare are summed up by the statement:

"He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face" (Nahum 2:1).

Here God is pictured using the Median army under Cyaxares as a battle-axe to destroy Nineveh.

In Nahum 2:3-4 and chapter 3:2-3, we have a description of military onslaught breaking with fury on the condemned city. Also in Nahum 2:6-8 reference is made to natural forces of rivers and flooding waters.

The historian, Deodorus Siculus, states that there was an old prophecy that Nineveh should not be taken till the river became its enemy. When Nineveh was hemmed in by her enemies suddenly the river flooded in, and by the great gap it made in the city walls the enemy entered. This was no mere chance of natural forces. God used His creation, as well as the armies of men, to blot out a people with whom He had long had patience.

The closing verses of the prophecy express the pathetic and final annihilation of the Assyrian nation.

*"Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.
There is no healing of thy bruise"* (Nahum 3:18-19).

In strict fulfilment of this prophecy Assyria never again rose to a national existence. Nahum's last remark is also significant. All whom Assyria had oppressed, including the afflicted sons of Jacob, are depicted as rejoicing over Assyria's destruction. So complete was Nineveh's destruction that three hundred years later Alexander the Great walked over it unaware that its remains were under his feet.

What, then, is the vital message of Nahum to our own age? Surely it is a message of the absolute justice of God, because, as Nahum clearly shows in chapter 3:7-8, God's wrath is always discriminative. His goodness is extended to those who trust in Him, and His judgment to those who are His avowed enemies. As God acted in wrath against Assyria, so He acts on the same unchanging principles in all ages.

Unrighteousness towards man, and impiety and idolatry towards God, bear the same bitter fruits everywhere, even though for a time transgressors seem to prosper. Our safety as individuals and as a nation does not depend on national prowess or military strength. The only security for us all is to put our trust in the Lord's mercy and pursue the path of godliness. Nahum sums this up for us beautifully:

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nahum 1:7).

OBADIAH

"The Kingdom is the LORD's"



The prophecy of Obadiah, containing just 21 verses, is the shortest book in the Old Testament; indeed the shortest in the whole Bible,¹

We know nothing of the author except his name, Obadiah, which means "servant of Jehovah". While the name is common in the Old Testament records, this writer cannot be identified with any of those who bear this name. The peculiar quality of the book is that in it the antagonism between Jacob and Esau is brought into clearer view than in any other prophecy, though much of what Obadiah says coincides with Jeremiah 49:7-22 and suggests they were contemporaries.

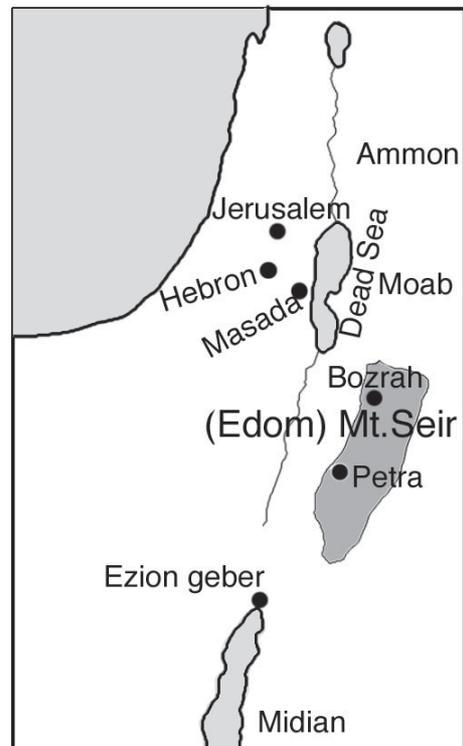
The Edomites lived in Mount Seir on the south-east of the Dead Sea. Mount Seir rises 2,000 feet above the Arabah Valley which runs from the Dead Sea to Ezion-geber (Eilat), and has a plateau about 20 miles wide. In ancient times it was a well-watered area on the edge of the Arabian desert.

The antagonism of Jacob and Esau is perpetuated in their descendant races of Israel and Edom (or Idumea). It is an antagonism that is patent throughout the Old Testament.

In Genesis we read of Rebekah that *"the children struggled within her"*, which thing created a premonition on Rebekah's part and filled her with fear.

Also we are familiar with the statement, *"Jacob have I loved, Esau have: I hated"*, of Romans 9:13, which I reference summarizes Malachil:1-3. God did not create that in Jacob which He loved, or that in Esau which He hated, but rather God's love or hatred resulted from what they were; what their character was.

The antagonism was always recognized in the Old Testament and was also



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carried over into the New Testament. It is revealed in an almost startling way in two outstanding personalities, those of Jesus and Herod. We must remember that Herod the Great was an Edomite and Jesus, according to the flesh, was a descendant of Jacob. Jesus never spoke to Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great and Malthake, a Samaritan. He once sent him a stinging message when the Pharisees warned Jesus to leave Galilee because Herod would kill Him. The Lord replied,

“Tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:31-33).

The Lord was not afraid of Herod Antipas; He would finish what He was doing and leave in His own time after three days.

The uncharitable relationship of Edom to Israel is the burden of this prophecy. In the background is Jacob, suffering by the chastening hand of God, while in the foreground Esau is seen gloating over Jacob's suffering and adding to his trouble; yet God is seen dealing with both. Certain punishment is predicted for Edom, and restoration and blessing for Jacob.

Analysis

Verses 1-9: The doom of Edom, despite his confidence in his impregnable stronghold in the rocky fortress of Petra in Mt. Seir.

Verses 10-14: The sin for which Edom is to be punished: rejoicing at Israel's calamity.

Verses 15-21: The day of the Lord is at hand, when Edom shall be punished and Israel shall triumph. We are away from the days of Jacob and Esau, but the principles revealed in them are still reappearing, and indeed were never more manifest in human history than they are today. The antagonism between Edom and Israel is in the world still.

1. The Revelation of Edom

What, then, is the revelation that we have here of Edom? It is a terrible picture of cruelty and violence, see verses 10-14. Edom is here seen watching from her heights of self-satisfaction the suffering of the nation of Israel, and presently acting so as to add to the sufferings of Jacob. This prophecy seems to fit the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldean armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Verses 11-14 clearly fit this attack on Jerusalem and Judah, which occurred about 586BC.

“In the day that the strangers (Gentiles) carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem.”

Edom is accused of going to the aid of the Chaldeans and sharing in the destruction of the Judaeans. They helped themselves to the plunder and posted themselves where they could cut off the flight of any Judaeans fugitives.

The Psalmist, after the destruction of Jerusalem, wrote:

“Remember, O LORD, the children of Edam in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof”(Ps 137:7).

That, however, is not the beginning of the revelation of Edam. What is the profound sin which underlies this cruelty and violence? We may say that it was that of godlessness, but let us remember that there was something prior to that too, and causing it. It is found in the words of verse three, *“The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.”* Pride of heart expressed itself in carelessness about God.

In the New Testament Esau is described as profane, not meaning careless or lewd of speech, but careless of God, and so having no spiritual conception and living for pure materialism.

“Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it (the blessing) carefully with tears” (Heb. 12:16).

Compare humanists of today. These too are Esau’s descendants. The man who says, “I do not want or need God; I am independent of God”: that is pride of heart - Edom’s sin.

That pride expressed itself in Edam’s false faith in the rocky fortress-city of Petra, which was deemed impregnable (See Verse 4). Climbing to this high mountain fortress, Edam was as an eagle nesting among the stars, and became guilty of self-deification, boastfully saying, *“Who shall bring me down?”* (V 3). So Edam was the embodiment of practical defiant godlessness.

If that conception does not shock us, it is because in our thinking today we have come to lay emphasis on certain sins. We shudder when we hear of them, failing to recognize that underlying all sin is this root sin - the pride of heart that says this life is sufficient in itself without any relationship to God.

But God said:

“Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down” (v.4).

We now enquire, How was that pride of heart manifested? The sins that are named as resulting from it were that of violence, cruelty, hardness of heart, hatred and opposition to all that Jacob represented. Edom's attitude toward Jacob was the outcome of an attitude toward God. When God is ignored, violence is done to our fellow men.

2. The Retribution of Edom

The question arises, How will this end? It was in order to answer this, probably, that the prophet uttered his message. In that hour of the brutal and violent opposition of Edom he hears the insolent cry, *"Who shall bring me down to the ground?"*

It must have seemed to poor suffering Jacob that Edom was always to flourish; that godlessness must triumph. But Jehovah had a word in reply, (vs. 4,8-9) *"I will bring thee down",* and *"destroy thy wise men"* and *"thy mighty men shall be dismayed"*. God is depicted working the utter destruction of Edom. Verse 10 says, *"Thou shalt be cut off for ever."*

Verse 5 tells that normally thieves do not carry away everything, but when Edom is finally dealt with it will be entire and complete. In verses 6 and 7 the prophet shows that such action will be through the co-operation of events:

"The men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee" (v.7).

The Chaldeans, whom they had aided in the destruction of Jacob, will turn and rend them.

History tells how some five years after the destruction of Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar was passing down the valley of Arabah, which formed the military road to Egypt, he crushed the Edomites. They were later subdued by the Maccabees about 150 B.C., and ceased to be a nation when the Romans captured Jerusalem.

The whole issue of Edom's sin and its retribution, is what we sometimes speak of as "poetic justice".

"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head" (v. 15).

Because Edom had assisted the Chaldeans in the destruction of Messiah's people, Edom would be likewise destroyed; but that is not all.

It cannot be too often emphasized that no Hebrew prophet ended on a note of pessimism. These men of God saw the gloom and

the darkness, saw the iniquity and the godlessness, but they saw beyond to the ultimate; for not only does the Day of the LORD see the destruction of the heathen and the punishment of godlessness, but it sees also the vindication of godliness.

Look at that final arresting word:

“Saviours shall come up on Mt Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (v21).

That final sentence, indeed all of verses 17-21, is spoken as an outburst from the depths of the prophet’s heart, as the result of profound conviction. The prophet has a vision of Messiah and His host in that great Day of the LORD achieving victory over Israel’s inveterate foes.

In the last days Edom will be as though she had never been. (Ezek.35:14-15), but Israel shall rise again and possess not only her own land, but also Philistia and Edom. She will finally rejoice in the holy reign of the promised Messiah.

“The house of Jacob shall be a fire....and the house of Esau for stubble... and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau” (v.18).

3. The Related Truth for our Day

The application of this prophecy for us is in the manifestation of the two opposing ways of life and their final outcome. We are far away from the days of Jacob and Esau, but the principles revealed in Jacob and Esau are still reappearing, and indeed were never more manifest in human history. The two ideals, the two conceptions, the two methods of life are in the world still.

C.R. Harding-Wood says, “The whole Bible is in miniature in Obadiah.” He looks backward to Jacob versus Esau, a reminder of Abel versus Cain. He looks on through the whole history of Israelites versus Edomites - dependence upon God versus independence of God - the spiritual over against the animal. No more dramatic pair of people ever stood side by side than Jesus the Israelite, and Herod the Edomite. To him, Jesus never spoke a word. You stand with one or the other! That is the personal application to you and me of the prophecy of Obadiah.

HABAKKUK

Problems, Principles and Praise



Little is known about Habakkuk except for the book that bears his name. Tradition says that he was a priest and the son of one, Joshua by name of the tribe of Levi. This is inferred from the liturgical note at the beginning and ending of the Psalm which constitutes the third chapter of his prophecy. It seems certain that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, with sensitiveness about evil, and impulses to question God, which remind us of Jeremiah. His prophecy appears to fit a date prior to the Babylonian captivity of Judah, and possibly during the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (607-597 BC).

There is a difference and an originality about Habakkuk's prophecy when compared with earlier prophets. They usually addressed the nation of Israel on behalf of God, whereas he speaks to God on behalf of Israel. He complains to God about the problems of life; eg man's inhumanity to man. He is at effort to find out what God means by permitting tyranny and wrong. The book is not a record of addresses delivered to the nation as most other prophecies are. It appears to be a narrative, in which the prophet records a dialogue between Jehovah and himself. The book is in five parts:

1. Habakkuk is perplexed in view of the sin of man and God's apparent silence (Hab.1:1-4).
2. The Lord answers the prophet's perplexity (Hab.1:5-11).
3. The prophet responds by testifying of God's might and justice (Hab.1:12-17).
4. The prophet further waits for God's answers, and receives God's response by way of a vision (Chapter 2).
5. Habakkuk responds to the vision by way of a Psalm of faith in God and His salvation (Chapter 3).

There are three main elements in this prophecy:

- A- Problems
- B - Principle
- C - Praise.

A. Problems

The prophecy is of considerable interest today because it deals with two problems which have in all ages been the concern of thoughtful people:

- 1) Why does God allow people to go on committing gross evil?
- 2) Why should God punish His own people by means of a nation far more evil than they?

In Habakkuk 1:2-4 the prophet addresses God in a wail of despair. He asks:

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity.. .for spoiling and violence are before me.. .judgment doth never go forth” (Hab.1:2-4).

It seems to Habakkuk that God is indifferent to the abounding wickedness and the breakdown of law and order.

In his bewilderment, Habakkuk expressed his mind in language with which we are familiar today. He was saying, “Why, oh why doesn’t God do something?” The very hour in which we are living is one in which many godly folk are conscious of the same sense of difficulty.

What is arresting is that when Habakkuk posed his problem and asked his question, “How long?” he asked it of God. What a lesson the prophet gives us about casting our burden upon the Lord! God will always, as in Habakkuk’s case, give honest answers to our prayer burdens.

In answer to Habakkuk’s complaint, God in effect declared that although His servant did not discern the divine activity, nevertheless He was acting. God would yet do a work in the prophet’s lifetime, which the prophet would find incomprehensible.

“For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Hab.1:5).

The work that God would work in Habakkuk’s day was to be executed by the treacherous Chaldeans who, under divine direction, would chasten His people Judah. These Chaldeans are described as a cruel scourge sweeping over the land to destroy it.

“For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces

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that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful...they shall come all for violence...they shall scoff at the kings...imputing this his power unto his god" (Hab.1:6-11).

What a lesson this is in how God works even in our day, on the international level. The nations have always been God's object lesson, illustrating His moral laws.

"Thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction" (Hab.1:12).

God's answer horrified Habakkuk, and in chapter 1:12-17 he remonstrates with God over the inhumanity of the Chaldeans. Why should a holy God, in executing divine judgment, appoint as minister of justice a nation more faithless and corrupt than its victim? (Hab.1:13).

And why should God make the nations like leaderless swarms of fish, to be repeatedly swept into the net, then emptied and slaughtered (Hab.1:14-17); and all the while the idolatrous oppressor, in brutal joy offers sacrifice to his nets (Hab.1:16).

Problem 1 was bad enough, but Habakkuk is saying, This is worse than ever. How can God use the wicked Chaldeans to chasten Judah, when the Chaldeans are more evil than they?

Here we discover a valuable lesson. There came a great moment in Habakkuk's life, when he said:

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd" (Hab.2:1).

In the same way, we must learn to trust and wait on God who knows the end from the beginning. God knows what He is doing, though we may not understand His ways. In due time His purposes will be revealed. God commands our patient waiting on Him, and for Him:

"Though it (the vision) tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"(Hab.2:3).

Does that seem an easy thing to do? Have you not discovered that waiting is the hardest of all activities. Wait! What a great word. How shall we wait? On the watchtower, telling God everything, unburdening our concern and then listening to Him. There is a poem entitled, "God is always right", and part of it says:

When I cannot understand it,
I simply trust my Lord;
When I cannot understand it,
I just believe His word,
For He knows all the answers.
The great Infinite Mind
Is filled with knowledge of the earth,
Of heaven, and mankind.

B. Principles

Habakkuk is told to write what God has to say to him so that *“he may run that readeth it”* (Hab.2:2). God wanted the warning to be spread abroad, and for men to have ample opportunity to repent.

Everything is in the throes of corruption around the prophet. Chaldea, the wicked, is coming to destroy what is left.

Habakkuk cannot understand it all and there is only One to whom he can turn, so he waits expectantly for God’s answer. And though the answer may be withheld a little longer until the divinely appointed time, yet he is assured it will certainly come. It was when Habakkuk was resigned to accept God’s message, and thus wait on the watchtower, that God gave him the secret of life.

“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab.2:4).

This verse draws a contrast. It is as though God says, Habakkuk, your opinion of the Chaldeans is correct, the nation is “puffed up”. That is one attitude and way of life. The contrasting attitude is, *“the just shall live by faith.”* Men are either wicked and self-glorified, or they are righteous, depending by faith on God.

The bulk of chapter 2 describes the inevitable result of the one who is lifted up within himself. There is a fivefold description of his evil attitude and way of life, identified in turn with a series of five woes (Hab.2: 6,9,12,15,19), each only emphasizing the fact that the evil will perish.

On the other hand, the righteous who live by faith have also an inevitable result to their way of life, and it is simply, yet emphatically affirmed in verse 4; *“they shall live.”* God is never in a hurry: but His purposes are just and sure. To Habakkuk it might have appeared that the Chaldeans were prospering for a time, but they were doomed.

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Let us believe the central truth of this principle and apply it. Let us put the measurement of Habakkuk 2:4 upon all the unanswered problems and injustices of life that confront us today, and we will be saved from a vast amount of anxiety.

There are interests, political and vested, proud arrogant things, lifting up themselves against God: but they will not live. The life element, the survival element is found in the humble believer whose faith is in God and His purposes. Habakkuk 2:13-14 speaks of the ultimate and final outcome. The Lord had no pleasure in seeing the people swept away by the Chaldeans, to be used as slaves to build the idolatrous city of Babylon. The ultimate outcome, however, would be one of blessing.

“Is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab.2:13-14).

No wonder the prophecy concludes with the Psalm of chapter 3.

C. Praise

The prophecy closes in Chapter 3 with a Psalm of praise, which reveals that all the problems have been answered and the prophet has renewed confidence in God. The term “Shigionoth” in verse 1 denotes music of an irregular character. It has been suggested that the word simply means “loud cries”, and so here it would refer to the cries of a man exulting for joy. The Psalm falls into three divisions:

First, there is a petition for the Lord’s intervention.

“O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab.3:2).

The history of the Exodus is described, when even nature trembled and quaked at the presence of the Lord on Sinai:

“The mountains saw thee, and they trembled” (Hab.3:10).

Second, there is a description of God’s glory revealed at Sinai.

“God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise” (Hab.3:3).

The vision recalls events from the past of how God wrought wonders for the salvation of His people; He “drove asunder the nations” (Hab.3:6). God was faithful to His covenant promises.

“Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word” (Hab.3:9).

The victory over the five kings of the Amorites (Josh.10:1-14) is recalled:

"The sun and the moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went...." (Hab.3:11).

The realization of what God has done in the past is so awe-inspiring that the prophet is overcome.

"When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble..." (Hab.3:16).

If God's power was so great on behalf of Israel when she entered the land, how frightening to contemplate that same power acting in chastening. Nevertheless, he is confident of the fact that when Jehovah acts in the day of trouble, he need not fear.

Finally, Habakkuk 3:17-19 expresses perfect trust in the purposes of God. Even in the midst of desolation the prophet declares that he will rejoice in the Lord, because God will ultimately right all wrongs, and the just who live by faith will be saved to live in peace and joy.

"Yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab.3:18).

Habakkuk concludes by quoting Psalm18:33, which expresses deliverance from enemies.

"The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places" (Hab.3:19).

These words reflect the prophet's boast of confidence in Jehovah and the ultimate outcome of right over wrong.

Habakkuk began his prophecy with a wail of woe in which he questioned God. He ends in confident exultation in the eternal purposes of God. How did he arrive at this final ecstatic state of mind? The answer to this question is a lesson, patent for our time.

We find ourselves in the midst of spiritual declension, violence, oppression, and injustice. We may at times question God and be tempted to think He is unconcerned. But if we will get to our watchtower and wait both on the Lord and for the Lord, we will see and understand that He is working to a plan and a principle, in which the arrogant and proud of the earth will be destroyed and the just who live by faith will ultimately triumph.

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No matter how hopeless the situation may appear humanly speaking, Habakkuk had learned to rejoice in the Lord. The just could live by faith and could rise above the threatening circumstances. He cried:

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail...yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab.3:17-18).

Perhaps Habakkuk saw in the fig tree, the vine, and the olive tree a picture of Israel, devoid of fruit for God and in a sad state of declension. His soul was deeply moved, but he refused to allow the sins of others or the inevitable consequences to destroy his own personal fellowship with God.

It was out of such communion with God and such knowledge of His ways that the prophet’s psalm of confidence and joy emerged. Thus we have in this beautiful chapter 3, the assurance that the humble man of faith can maintain a perfect and unwavering confidence in God, however dark the outlook may be around him.

Portion of William Cowper’s poem is appropriate here:

“In holy contemplation we sweetly then pursue
The theme of God’s salvation, and find it ever new;
Set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may.
Though vine and fig tree neither their wanted fruit shall bear,
Though all the field should wither, nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding, His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.”

ZEPHANIAH

“The Day of the LORD”



Zephaniah the prophet identifies himself in the opening verse of his prophecy. He traces his pedigree back four generations to Hezekiah, king of Judah. Thus, he was of royal blood and a citizen of Jerusalem. He tells us also that he exercised his ministry during the reign of King Josiah (637-608 BC), which makes him a contemporary of Jeremiah and Habakkuk. He foretold the destruction of Nineveh (Zeph.2:13) which took place in 612BC, and conditions described in his prophecy suggest a period just prior to Josiah's reform. Zephaniah's strong denunciation probably did much to prepare the way for that reformation. The key to this prophecy is the oft-repeated phrase, "the day of the Lord." Zephaniah had a real burden concerning the coming of divine judgment on Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and on ALL THE EARTH in the last days.

Medieval art portrayed Zephaniah as "the man with the lantern of the Lord," searching out sinners for destruction. This representation in art came probably on the basis of chapter 1 verse 12. He has been called "the prophet of doom".

Zephaniah foretells the invasions by Nebuchadnezzar beginning in 606BC, and these become a foreshadowing of greater judgment in the last days. The expression, "the day of the Lord", refers to times of divine judgment relating to the land of Israel and the whole world.

Twice in history God's wrath has fallen on Jerusalem, and final judgment is predicted during the Great Tribulation. In 606-586BC God's wrath was poured out and Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument of judgment. Again in AD70 Jerusalem was destroyed, this time with the Romans as the instrument of judgment. These calamities are foretold in Scripture and may be called the Day of the Lord, but most of the prophecies of the Day of the Lord refer to the last days.

The prophecy is in four parts:

1. Chapter 1 to 2:3 - A declaration that the Day of the Lord is coming on Judah and a final call to repent.
2. Chapter 2:4-15 - Judgments on Israel's neighbours predicted.
3. Chapter 3:1-7 -The corrupt state of Jerusalem in the prophet's

time.

4. Chapter 3:8-20 -The final judgment of the nations in the last days with a promise of mercy and restoration for God's faithful remnant. At that time God will *"get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame"*(Zeph.3:19).

There are three things revealed in the reading of the book concerning the Day of the Lord, and we will indicate them by three simple and related words:

1. Content of the Day of the Lord
2. Extent of the Day of the Lord
3. Intent of the Day of the Lord.

1. The Content of the Day of the Lord

What is the *"Day of the Lord"* all about according to Zephaniah? It is *"the day of the LORD's anger"*(Zeph.2:3), and can best be answered by noting certain statements in the prophecy.

i) The first of these is a declaration that God will visit Judah and Jerusalem in judgment. We read:

"I will utterly consume all things from off the land...I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham (Zeph.1:2,4-5).

ii) The prophet then proceeds to declare that this *"Day of the Lord"* will come in spite of man's unbelief in it.

"I will...punish the men... that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph.1:12).

This compares with Peter's teaching:

"There shall come in the last days scoffers...saying, Where is the promise of his coming? ...But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:3-4,10).

And also Paul's words:

"When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1Thess.5:3).

iii) Also, the prophet declares that this *"Day of the Lord"* will be unprecedented in Zephaniah's day. The language used in chapter Zephaniah 1: 14-18 clearly indicates this truth. The Jerusalem had

never been so utterly desolated before as it was in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, but Jesus indicates that the final Day of the Lord will be unprecedented in the last days and will never again be repeated.

"Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt.24:21).

This, then, is the message of Zephaniah: God's patience ran out in Zephaniah's day, and it will run out again in the last days.

"For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent" (Zeph.3:8-9).

It is convenient for rebellious men to think nothing will happen, for it gives license to their permissiveness and evil. The declaration of the prophet Zephaniah is, that there is a *"day of the Lord"*.

2. The Extent of the Day of The Lord

We must ask first, "At what is this judgment directed?" The prophecy clearly names Judah's sin in various forms, but in particular it nominates sin in its final stages of luxury and indifference (See Zeph.1:12). *"Men that are settled on their lees"*, portrays luxury; while men who say, *"The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil"*, portrays indifference. This is the constantly recurring condition of sin that evokes God's wrath. The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire shows this. The final stages of sin in the history of mankind, upon which the wrath of the Day of the Lord will fall, will be characterized by these same things.

Two cities are in view in this prophecy: Jerusalem and Nineveh. Nineveh was to be destroyed in 612 BC (Zeph.2:13-15), and Jerusalem would suffer a similar fate in 586 BC; her sins are recorded (Zeph.3:1-5).

"I have cut off the nations...I said, Surely thou wilt fear me....but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings" (Zeph.3:6-7).

History records how Jerusalem was destroyed and the day of the Lord's anger fell in the period 606 to 586 BC, but this is only a foreshadowing of the greater Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation.

3. The Intent of the Day of The Lord

What is the ultimate purpose of this terrible activity of *"the day of the Lord?"* That is answered in Ch. 3:9-20, where the prophecy looks **beyond the immediate destruction of Jerusalem** by Nebuchadnezzar

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to the final Day of the Lord in the last days. This final outpouring of God's wrath will be instrumental in bringing Israel to repentance, and result in the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom.

A liberal commentator says it is perfectly patent that this passage was not written by Zephaniah because it is in too great a contrast with the awful picture of judgment just given. This shows just how stupidly blind man can be to God's merciful purposes. God punishes in order that He may heal; He chastens that He may restore.

After the picture of desolation given by the prophet, he shows what is God's ultimate purpose. Here, especially in chapter 3 verses 14 to 17, we have the picture of a new order, the Messiah enthroned, and songs and gladness instead of sorrow and desolation.

"The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more" (Zeph.3:15).

Here is the picture of a refined remnant, settled instead of scattered. Here is a new cleansed earth and the kingdom of Christ established. Thus, the millennial reign follows hard upon the purging judgments of the Tribulation, when God says,

"All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy" (Zeph.3:8).

The very contrast in Zephaniah's prophecy between judgment and its intention of restoration, demonstrates the unity of the book as to its authorship. Zephaniah writes of the Day of the Lord as a day of swift, consuming judgment upon a sinning, self-indulgent, complacent world, but he ends his book telling of the Lord rejoicing because of the ultimate intent of His wrath; the blessing of Israel.

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph.3:17).

How do we relate this message of Zephaniah to our generation? Clearly, our day is ripe for this Day of the Lord. Only the Rapture needs to take place before the final Day of the LORD bursts upon a self-indulgent and indifferent world. That judgment must surely come swiftly and unrestrained is obvious. What should we do?

The Church will not be here for the final Day of the LORD, but surely Zephaniah's call to Israel applies to us.

"Seek ye the Lord... seek righteousness, seek meekness" (Zeph.2:3).

We know that Israel will seek the Lord in the day of *"the fierce anger*

of the LORD", and God will provide for her a refuge that she may be "hid in the day of the Lord's anger"(Zeph.2:3). Isaiah prophesies to Israel of this:

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself...for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (Isa.26:20-21).

Today the believer has a brighter prospect: the Blessed Hope, the Rapture of the Church. Let us

"Abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John2:28).

The Day of the Lord

by John Ecob

The day of God's anger is the Day of the LORD;
A day of thick darkness when wrath is outpoured;
A day of dark clouds, and infinite gloom;
A day of remorse, and terrible doom.

The day of the Lord has been in the past
When God's patience with Israel had run out at last;
The armies of Babel descend like a cloud;
The Temple and city were levelled and ploughed.

But worse is to come in days just ahead,
The horsemen are mounted, white, black and red.
The pale horse, too, will introduce death,
In the Day of the Lord; the words of God's breath.

The Great Tribulation, is what we are told
Is poured out by heaven, as judgments unfold;
The Lamb on the throne has taken the book;
The seals are now broken, and heaven can look.

The day of God's anger, is the wrath of the Lamb,
When into the caves and holes men will cram
And cry to the rocks, Fall down on us now!
Every mouth must confess Him, and every knee bow!

Oh, how can we know when this day will come?
What sign has been given? Please tell me the sum.
The thief in the night will catch up from earth
The blood-washed redeemed, who've had second birth.

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When loved ones are missing, the rich and the poor,
You'll know by the clothes they've left on the floor,
Then, only then, will you know your sad fate;
You'll cry out with fear - you've left it too late.

Oh, enter the door of God's mercy and love,
Be ready for Jesus who comes from above,
Repent and believe, His mercy is free;
He paid all your debt on Mount Calvary.

But can I be sure of God's marvellous grace,
That one day I'll look on His glorious face?
Yes, yes you can know, be certain and sure;
His Word gives His promise of life evermore.

My doubts are all gone and I'm looking above;
My Saviour is coming in infinite love;
In a moment of time He'll take home His Bride;
The trumpet will sound, I won't need to hide.

And so shall I be forever with Him,
Though now my poor vision of Him may be dim.
Then in God's presence and glorious light,
My eyes shall behold Him - oh wonderful sight!

Joel

The Day of the LORD Declared



Joel means “Jehovah is God”, and all we are told of him is that he was the son of Pethuel. From many references to Zion, Jerusalem and Judah and from his familiarity with the Temple, we may infer that his home was in Judah.

The book gives no positive indication as to the period during which he lived but the general background and time is sufficiently clear. The northern kingdom of Israel (the ten tribes) is never mentioned. Judah appears as a self-contained community, so compact that every man, woman and child can be summoned to attend an assembly at the Temple (Ch.2:15-17). There is no mention of a king. The rulers are elders and priests, and it is the priests who are prominent. The Temple with its daily services is central, both in the life of the community and in the mind of the prophet. All this points to a post-exilic date, as do the references to the Exile as a painful memory of the past (Ch.3:2). The twenty quotations from twelve earlier books of the Old Testament, the mention of the Greeks as slavetraders (Ch.3:6), the development of apocalyptic teaching and eschatology are like to that of Ezekiel, the prophet of the Exile.

It is generally felt that the book should be assigned to the first half of the fourth century BC, after the reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra. The burden of his message is revealed in the phrase, “*the day of the Lord*”, which occurs five times in the course of the book (Joel 1:15; 2:1; cp 2: 2:11; 2:31; 3:14) and “*that day*” (Joel 3:18).

There can only be one “*day of the Lord*” (the last days) though many periods of history may be types of the final vindication of Jehovah’s reign. For this reason I interpret the Book of Joel as follows:

- A. As symbolized in a present catastrophe of the locust plague.
- B. As a challenge to Israel to repent and thus secure Jehovah’s blessing.
- C. In a direct portrayal of Jehovah judging the nations and vindicating His purposes in the last days.

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The prophecy of Joel divides fairly readily into three sections in this regard.

Chapter 1 - Parable or purpose in the catastrophe of the locust plague.

Chapter 2 - Promise of Jehovah's response to Israel's penitence.

Chapter 3 - Prophetic preview of the final and real day of the Lord.

1) Parable of the Locust Plague - Ch 1.

Joel's prophecy was motivated by a plague of locusts, the appearance of which and the havoc they worked are described by him in full detail. He saw in the locusts a picture of the great Day of the Lord and puts into his picture descriptions which carry the imagination beyond the limits of the present calamity.

Travellers furnish us with terrible impressions of the innumerable multitudes of a locust plague, the succession of their swarms through days and weeks, the intense enveloping noise, less like the noise of their whirring of wings than the rattle of hail or the crackling of a bush fire, and the systematic order of their flight like armies of soldiers. They are particularly notorious for their voracity and have been described as "the incarnation of hunger." Literally everything is destroyed in their path, even to the bark of the trees which remain like skeletons destroyed by an intense forest fire.

Appalling famine is the result after such devastation of the land. People and flocks die for lack of food.

At first Joel describes the actual plague, sent to make his people feel the terror of it. In his opening verses he summons the drunkards (Joel 1:5), then he summons the priests who have nothing left to offer to the Lord. (Joel 1:9). He speaks of cattle and sheep crying in the field (Joel 1:10). Joel would stun the careless people into a sense of the brutal weight of the calamity which has befallen them because they must be convinced that it comes from Jehovah, just as the future Day of the LORD will come.

"Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come" (Joel 1:15).

Thus Joel reaches the climax of his argument - Jehovah is near and His Day is about to break. Such, then, is the explanation of the first part of the prophecy and its development towards a call to repentance. The locusts picture the greater judgment of the Great Day of the Lord, and "who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11).

Joel believed that Day was imminent and that the locust plague was a sign to introduce it, and yet even if it was not so imminent, he warns them never to forget it: *"Tell ye your children...and their children another generation"*(Joel 1:3). They must mourn with true repentance if they wished to escape in that future terrible day. See Joel 1:13-14 and Joel 2:1-2.

2) Promise of God's Response to Israel's Penitence - Ch.2.

In chapter two Joel applies the plague in a parabolic way to the Day of the Lord, and then makes his plea for repentance a second time:

"The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining ... for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:10-13).

The words of blessing are repeated, which were given when Israel was called at Sinai and the Covenant was established.

"The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands" (Exod.34: 6-7; Joel 2:13).

So Joel summons the nation to try Jehovah by penitent prayer, pleading that He should not give His people to reproach among the Gentiles (Joel 2:17).

The future conversion of Israel during the Tribulation is evident from Joel 2:18-32, which begins with a promise in verse 18.

"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people...the LORD will answer...and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: But I will remove far off from you the northern army... because he hath done great things" (Joel 2:18-20).

With these words Joel opens the second half of his book. Our Authorised Version renders them in future tense, as the continuation of the prophet's discourse which had threatened the Day of the Lord. He urged the people to penitence, and now promises that their penitence shall be followed by the Lord's mercy. He has the Lord personally outlining all He will do in both the near and distant future for His penitent people.

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Verse 20 describes the sudden removal of the invading army, just as the locusts disappear with the same suddenness as they arrive. (Compare Exodus 10:19 where a wind springs up and the locusts are cast into the Red Sea). God responds to Israel's repentance with the destruction of the northern army, symbolized by the removal of the plague of locusts. This no doubt is the same invasion as that described in Ezekiel 38 & 39.

God promises to restore the rainy seasons, the early and latter rains, and the fruitfulness of the land. The result is a super-abundant harvest that makes up for whatever they had lost because of the plague. Because the prophet uses the parabolic method, we should see the greater fulfilment of this promise after the Tribulation. God says:

"And I will restore to you (Israel) the years that the locust hath eaten... my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall... praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:25-26).

Upon these promises of physical blessing there follows another, of the out-pouring of the Spirit, the prophecy by which the Book of Joel is best known among Christians. See verses 28 and 29. Here is what is termed the prophecy or promise of Pentecost.

To Joel was committed the privilege of declaring that God would pour out His Spirit upon ALL FLESH. This prophecy was partially fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter said:

"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass IN THE LAST DAYS, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:16-21).

Joel wrote:

"And it shall come to pass AFTERWARD, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 2:28).

We need to understand what Joel meant in chapter 2:28 by the term "AFTERWARD", relative to the time of fulfilment. The preceding verses describe the conversion of Israel in the Tribulation. The ultimate outpouring of the Spirit on "all flesh" (Gentiles) is therefore placed AFTER this event and refers to the millennial kingdom.

Acts 2:17 gives a specific interpretation of this word as "in the last days". The Hebrew "acherith", meaning latter or last, obviously refers to the end times or winding up of the age. It therefore refers to the Advent of Christ, the Church Age, and the final glory of Christ in the Millennium.

Pentecost is the beginning of a continuous fulfilment during these last days, but there is little doubt that even greater fulfilment will come, especially to Israel as a nation. This great outpouring of the Spirit on Israel is therefore yet future (Ezek. 36:23-33; 39:29).

Dr.C.I.Schofield says:

“The last days as related to the Church began with the first Advent of Christ (Heb. 1:2) but have a special reference to the time of declension and apostasy at the end of this age (2 Tim 3:1-4). The last days as related to Israel are the days of Israel’s exaltation and blessing and are synonymous with the Kingdom Age (Isa.2:2-4; Micah 4:1-7). They are last not with reference to this dispensation, but with reference to the whole of Israel’s history.”

Although the ultimate fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy applies to the time when the Spirit will be poured out on ALL FLESH (Gentiles) during the millennial kingdom, Peter used this fact to his Jewish audience to justify the conversion of Gentiles in the Church. He began his quotation of Joel with “*all flesh*”, and finished with “*whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Acts 2:17, 21).

Joel has been called “the prophet of religious revival”. He knew that revival must follow repentance. A rent heart is followed by a rent veil and an open heaven. Joel preached to bring his people to this place.

We will find access to the throne of grace and know the presence of the Holy Spirit when we truly repent. There is an application for us today; the Church is in a desolate condition, laid waste by many spiritual foes, well described in the figures of speech in Joel 1:4. There is a spiritual famine and drought on all sides. The call goes to Christians today to go into the dust before the Lord in true repentance of heart. This repentance must begin at the house of God. The principle is the same for Israel and the Church.

If we will return unto the Lord, He will fulfil His promise to us in the fulness of the Spirit’s presence and power, and then He will restore “*the years that the locust hath eaten*”.

3. Prophetic Preview of the Day of the LORD

The plague of locusts is made the occasion for the prophecy of the Day of the Lord not yet fulfilled. After the outpouring of the Spirit on Israel, apocalyptic portents of the approaching judgment of the

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Great and Terrible Day of the Lord will appear.

“And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of the LORD come” (Joel 2:30-31).

However, terrible as the Day of the Lord will be, those who are His true worshippers (ie whosoever invokes Jehovah’s name) will be saved. The words of verse 32 have a universal ring and lend themselves to quotation in a wider sense in Romans 10:13 but in Joel they refer only to loyal Jews of Judah and the Dispersion here called *“the remnant”* (Joel 2:32).

Chapter 3 describes the final onslaught not just by the *“northern army”*, but by *“all nations”*. Joel describes Jehovah’s judgment on the Gentiles for their treatment of God’s people, *“whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land”* (Joel 3:2).

Chapter 3:1 tells of the **return of the Jews to the Holy Land in unbelief prior to the day of judgment on the Gentiles**. This return is taking place today with rapidity.

Then in verse 2, almost synonymous as to the time of their return will the Gentile nations be assembled in warfare against the Jews. Joel tells us Jehovah will assemble all nations in the *“valley of Jehoshaphat”* and there contend in judgment with them. Verse 14 calls the *“valley of Jehoshaphat”* the *“valley of decision”*, because there the Lord effects the final and great decisive judgment of the living nations who have persecuted the Jews during the Tribulation.

Significantly, *“Jehoshaphat”* means *“Jehovah judges”*, and God says:

“Let the heathen be wakened and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about” (Joel 3:12).

The actual location is generally agreed to be the Valley of Kedron between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem where it is the ambition of Jews to be buried in order that they may be ready to meet the Messiah on that day.

In Joel 3:4 certain nations are nominated as examples of the sin of the Gentiles against the Jews. The sins are primarily those of harassing the Jews and taking away their heritages, pirating their treasures, selling their children into slavery and shedding their blood. Jehovah challenges the Gentiles to battle:

“Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men...Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong” (Joel 3:9-10).

They are summoned by His heralds to prepare themselves for war, and to march into the valley where the battle will be fought. Arriving there, they will meet their doom.

In Joel 3:13 the scene is likened to a ripened harvest cut down, and grapes crushed in the winepress. This is that final battle of the ages called Armageddon, which is dealt with more fully in Revelation 14:14-20 and Revelation 19:11-21. John wrote:

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle...And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped...And the winepress was trodden without the city, and the blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles...” (Rev.14:14-20).

The Lord Himself comes down from heaven to earth to personally overthrow the nations in the fierceness of His wrath (compare Zechariah ch.14). This is the “Great” Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is agreed to be the period of time when the Lord judges the nations, returns in power and glory, and then establishes His reign in Jerusalem as King of kings. The Day of the Lord then continues for a period of approximately one thousand years (Rev 20:4). (Cp. Isa 2:17-20; 3:7-18; 4:1-2; 13:6-9; Jer 46:10; Mal 4:5; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

So it is that man’s day of decision is over, and the Lord’s hour of destiny has arrived. Though the Gentile armies are destroyed, yet Israel is safe (Joel 3:16). Never again will Jerusalem be defiled with the presence of strangers. The climax of the prophecy is the coming of Christ in glory and power. He comes to execute judgment and to deliver His people.

“The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joe13:15-16).

The prophecy draws to a conclusion in Joel 3:18 with a promise of rich fruitfulness and blessing for Israel in that ideal future which the return of the Lord inaugurates. Mountains and hills will be covered with vineyards and pastures, and the rivers of Judah will flow with water.

“A fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim” (Dead Sea) (Joel 3:18; Ezek.47; Zech.14:8).

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Edom and Egypt will be desolate but Judah will be established and inhabited forever, and above all, the Lord will dwell in the city of Zion (Joel 3:20-21). The prophecy ends with the words:

“But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion” (Joel 3:20-21).

For Israel, the prophecy indicates that the nation will be brought to its knees before the Lord Jesus Christ during the Tribulation, when the armies of a Russian/Muslim alliance sweeps into the land from the north as described in Joel 2. The temple will be rebuilt at that time, and as the priests weep between the porch and the altar God will intervene removing the “northern army”. After Armageddon, when “all nations” come to Jerusalem, Christ will reign from Zion and a redeemed Israel will be exalted to the head of the nations, experiencing indescribable blessing.

“So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more” (Joel 3:17).

The Times of the Gentiles will be finished.

For us, it is of the utmost importance that we should recognize where we are in this plan of the ages. We live in the age of the outpoured Spirit, the Church Age, and the message we are called upon to deliver is that of the possibility of the full realization of life in Christ in the energy of the Spirit. Our business is ever to urge men to call upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32), and thus be delivered from the dreadful judgments to be meted out during this Day of the Lord.

Those who are saved in this age have the promise of God’s Word that we are not appointed to the wrath of the Day of the Lord, but to be raptured with all those “in Christ” (1 Thess.5:9). We are reassured by the words:

“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thess.5:4).

This is our “Blessed Hope”.

HAGGAI

Zeal for the Lord of Hosts and His House



It is generally agreed that Haggai was of the tribe of Levi and was born in Babylon during the captivity. He came to Jerusalem among the Judea .. exiles who returned after the seventy years captivity. His prophecy is referred to in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, where he is associated with the prophet Zechariah.

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were the last of the Old Testament prophets and they were God's mouthpiece to the remnant after the exile in Babylon. The message of Haggai is entirely different from that of the earlier prophets who denounced idolatry and heathenish practices. He chiefly denounced the sins of secularism and lack of fervour for the House of the Lord; nor does he set out to announce future judgment in the manner of other prophets. He is rather concerned with an immediate and local situation. His central theme is the rebuilding of the Temple.

The Book of Ezra, particularly chapters five and six, outlines the historical setting of Haggai's ministry. By a decree of Cyrus in 536BC, about fifty thousand Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem with the set purpose of rebuilding the Temple.

The work was begun soon after their return, about sixteen years before Haggai's prophecy. Soon after they laid the foundations Samaritan opposition caused them to abandon the work, and for about fifteen years nothing more seems to have been done. During this time interest in the Temple waned and the people built their own houses, luxuriating in their personal affairs.

The heart attitude of the Jews was reflected in their work. Hence Haggai was moved of God to rebuke the people and encourage them to build God's House. He insisted that the blessing of God upon their lands and labours depended on their concern for God's honour in setting their hands to the erection and furnishing of the Temple.

The book is clearly dated. It consists of four pronouncements, each introduced by the formula, "*Came the word of the Lord by Haggai*".

Each of these four messages was delivered during the second year of Darius, king of Persia, 520 BC. His first message was delivered on

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the first day of the sixth month and caused the people to commence building, but when difficulties arose they halted.

Again he addressed them on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, and they resumed work, but further discouragement arose and they again halted. Finally, Haggai addressed them with two messages on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, and the work was continued through to completion.

The book reveals the peculiar perils of that age and shows the duty of God's people to overcome discouragement. Haggai's message has four parts by reason of four perils which he addresses.

1. The Peril of False Contentment - Haggai 1:1-15

As these people looked at the conditions in which they found themselves, they said,

"The time is not come... that the Lord's house should be built"
(Haggai.1:2).

It seemed they were waiting for the psychic moment in which to begin building God's House. On that side of their life which had to do with God, they were waiting; yet they were pre-eminently practical about building their own houses. Haggai reproves them for building their own ceiled houses while saying the time is not come to build for God.

Haggai affirms that God is judging them because of their complacency and neglect of His honour. He says:

"Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough ...ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it, Why?.. .Because of mine house that is waste... Therefore...I called for a drought upon the land..."
(Haggai.1 :5-11).

Surely we can see a parallel here for our country today. references to drought and poor crops and economic insecurity. God still requires that His people honour Him and His place of worship. When people neglect.

Notice the public worship, it is usually symptomatic of a false contentment in material things and a neglect of spiritual priorities, even a neglect of God Himself.

Remember David's words:

"LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Ps.26:8, Cp Ps.84).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote:

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching” (Heb.10:25).

God was chastening them, and Haggai declared that their immediate duty was to build the house of God. The effect of this stern call to duty was that the people “obeyed the voice of the LORD their God” and began to work. Haggai responded with a great word of encouragement from the Lord:

“I am with you, saith the Lord” (Haggai. 1:13).

The people had been waiting, however, God was there all the time, but they had neglected Him and His presence had been withdrawn. Once they obeyed the Lord, they were assured of His presence.

2. The Peril of False Discontent - Haggai 2:1-9

After work had commenced on the Temple Haggai asked a question of those who had seen the first Temple;

“Is it not in your eyes in comparison (to that former building)...as nothing?” (Haggai 2:3).

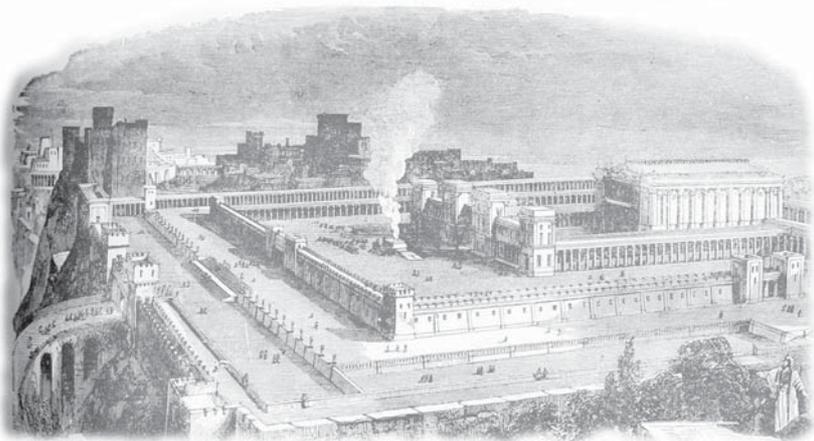
The Temple they were erecting was so inferior to Solomon’s Temple that they might well be discouraged. For the correction of this discontent Haggai declares that their duty was to *“be strong...and work.”* As a dynamic for encouragement he repeated the divine promise, *“I am with you, saith the Lord”* (Haggai 2:4). Then in verse five, He affirms:

*“So my spirit
remaineth among
you: fear ye not “*
(Haggai 2:5).

In verses six to nine Haggai bids them look forward and not back. Though for the present they may feel that their efforts were

insignificant, yet it is the future that counts. The glory of the first Temple was great indeed. At its dedication, we read:

“The glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the house” (2 Chron.7:1-2).



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Yet this latter house would be filled with greater glory, for Christ "*the desire of nations*" would come, and His glory would surpass anything seen in Solomon's Temple. The ultimate fulfilment will be in the second coming of Christ and the glorious Millennial Temple. The glory of Solomon's Temple was materialistic, but the latter house would be the fulfilment of all, and more than that which was foreshadowed in the former.

Thus we are warned of the peril of lamenting the past; of desiring an experience today like we enjoyed in the past. Men complain and sigh for the grand days of revival. We all would like a return of the good old days prior to this present apostasy, but it is uttermost folly to attempt to interpret the present in terms of the past. No matter how great the past blessings have been, God can do greater things for us if we trust Him.

It is not the past that should govern our present work for God, or the insignificant nature of what we are doing now, but the future prospect of Christ's coming and ultimate triumph; then His glory will be fully manifested in all the earth. Let us accept the present as something God allows, and get to work for Him. It is false to look back.

3. The Peril of False Expectation - Haggai 2:10-19

When the building had proceeded for three months the people expected some immediate material blessings as reward, yet there was no sign of providential relief from drought and economic recession. Haggai now had to teach them that this was an unwarranted expectation in view of the appalling penetration of evil resulting from their sin and neglect. They had put off the building of the Temple, and the land had been rendered useless as a consequence of their prolonged neglect of God.

By means of dialogue with the priests, Haggai asks:

"If one bear holy flesh...and touch bread...shall it be holy?"

The priests answer, "No."

Conversely,

"If one that is unclean... touch any of these, shall it be clean?"

They reply:

"It shall be unclean."

God's law simply stated, is that the touch of a holy thing does not sanctify so much as the touch of an unholy thing pollutes (Haggai 2:12-14).

The application of this principle is very clear. The people were polluted, and so even their sacrifices were polluted. This pollution had further resulted in the dearth of their land and the collapse of their economy. They were personally to blame for the lack of blessings and had no right to expect that all would be immediately set right by their repentance and reform.

The people said in effect, We are giving God obedience, we are building His house, but He is giving us nothing in return. They expected immediate material benefit as the result of their moral and spiritual reformation. "No", said the prophet, "God will act in His time as a gift of grace: but not as a result created by your human amendment."

The lesson they had to learn, was that obedience must be without bargaining. Yet the prophet did not leave them with only the stern application of this principle of law. Haggai gave them a word of grace out of the very heart of God, as found in the last clause of verse nineteen, *"from this day will I bless thee."* The blessing both as to time and content is God's prerogative by grace. We must never imagine that we can buy God's favours, or that by repentance and obedience we have an immediate right to rewards.

4. The Peril of False Fear - Haggai 2:20-23

The Lord's final word through Haggai was one of assurance. Wherever these Jews looked they saw the strength of the heathen kingdoms with their armies of chariots and horses. There seemed to be no chance for them to ever regain their national constitution and freedom. They would be forever suppressed and filled with dull despair and a false fear.

As an antidote to this fear, Haggai uttered great promises from God concerning the future destruction of Gentile power. He called them to cease looking at Gentile domination, and to look to the Lord of hosts, who will triumph in the Day of the Lord:

"I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother" (Haggai 2:22).

In chapter 2:6-7 Haggai speaks of this time when, God says:

"I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory. "

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These words clearly depict the Day of the Lord and the Tribulation which culminates in the overthrow of Gentile world power in the Battle of Armageddon.

The prophecy concludes with a promise that the LORD would take Zerubbabel and make him as "a signet". Signature rings were used by kings to stamp their approval on documents. When Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over Egypt, we read that he

"took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand... "
(Gen.41:42).

Pharaoh's action indicated that he vested all his authority in Joseph, and when God made Zerubbabel *"as a signet"*(ring), He was bestowing on him divine authority for the task of building the Temple. God said:

"For I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts " (Haggai 2:23).

When God chooses His servants to perform a task, He also endows them with His authority to carry out the work.

But the prophecy goes beyond Zerubbabel. Obviously Haggai saw this governor of his day as a type and promise of the greater Servant of the Lord - the coming Messiah, who in the Day of the Lord will sit upon the throne of Judah and rule with all the authority of God.

Application for Today

We need this message from Haggai for the correction of our fears today. As we see the gathering of military multitudes, of hatred and war, we too should remember the promised blessed hope of the return of Christ.

What we supremely need is a vision of the Lord and a renewed hope of His return. We need a new appreciation that all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever.

Thus Haggai has related the truth about life's immediate circumstances to the greater facts of the ultimate - the consummation of all things in the Day of the Lord. In that day the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

His message to us today is to seek the glory of the Lord before our own personal gain, and patiently toil on in the work of the Lord, even though the blessings be few. Let us not be afraid but trust God, for His promise will not fail, and He that shall come, will come. He has said:

"Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev.22:20).

ZECHARIAH

The Promise of Messiah, the Hope of Israel



Zechariah was born in Babylon during the time of the captivity. His name means, “he whom the Lord remembers.” He was the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo. He probably came to Jerusalem with the first party of about fifty thousand released exiles, among whom his grandfather Iddo came as head of one of the twelve courses of priests (Neh 12:4). He later succeeded his grandfather in this priestly office (Neh 12:16). We notice that he was both a priest and a prophet like Iddo before him. The angel refers to him as a “*young man*” (Zech.2:4) when he uttered his first prophecies.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 5:1-2; Zech 4:6; 6:11).

The prophecy is divided into two parts:

1. The first eight chapters consist of messages from the Lord which are clearly dated and cover the period between November 520BC to December 518BC, which was during the final stages of the rebuilding of the Temple.
2. Chapters nine through to fourteen are undated, but probably followed within succeeding years after the Temple was completed. They give prophecy concerning the latter days with the coming of Messiah who will deliver His people from their Gentile oppressors and establish God’s kingdom in the millennial reign.

The prophecy has been called the Apocalypse (ie unveiling) of the Old Testament. It is used by New Testament writers more than any other prophecy, so clear and frequent are its predictions concerning Christ, both in His first advent and rejection, and in His second coming to the earth.

As the Book is so great, both in size and subject matter, it is impossible in the limited space of this article to give a complete coverage of its teaching. I propose therefore to concentrate on what clearly seems to be the main burden of the Book.

Zechariah opens his Book with a call to repentance from the sins which brought God’s judgment upon the people.

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Then by visions and direct appeal he seeks to encourage this despondent and oppressed nation to a future hope by promises of deliverance from the Gentiles who oppress them. This is to be effected by the promised coming of Messiah, who will restore and sanctify them in the last days by His kingly reign upon earth.

The hope of the nation was practically extinguished. Hemmed in by opposing forces, without national constitution and power, it must have seemed to that feeble remnant that there was little hope in the future. The peculiar value of Zechariah's teaching was that it was calculated to inspire hope in the hearts of these discouraged people. This hope centres in a most stately portrait of the great Messiah Deliverer and King, who through suffering provides for their cleansing and through conquest effects their restoration.

The burden of the Book is its revelation of:

A - The preeminent presence of the LORD of hosts.

B - His pervasive power

C - His persistent purpose.

A - The Preeminent Presence

Zechariah's one inclusive appeal is contained in the words:

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts"(Zech.1:3).

Notice the thrice-repeated title, "*Jehovah of hosts.*" Zechariah used it more extensively than any other prophet. Fifty-three times does this majestic title appear in Zechariah's prophecy. The title did not appear in the early history of the Bible, but is first used in 1 Samuel 1:3, which is a book of transition from the Theocratic to the monarchic form of government. That was the occasion when Israel turned from God to human government. So the title was born with the monarchy.

On the human side it was the result of the people's thought of massed armies, but it gathered significance over the years and was used in association with angels and the stars and armies. Its real significance was that Jehovah is Sovereign, Lord and Master of all these hosts, and He is actively marshalling all hosts, whether angels or men.

Zechariah prophesied in a day when Israel had lost its army, its monarchy, and its organization, and he constantly spoke of Jehovah of hosts, thus reminding the people of the abiding presence and active sovereignty of Jehovah.

In chapter 1:3 the prophet insists that it is God's method to speak and make known His will. Furthermore, He calls His people back. He marshals them to submit in order to do His will. Surely therein is their only hope for the future. Significantly, He provides a way for their return. In chapter 3:7-8 it is the LORD of hosts who says,

"Behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH".

This is a reference to Christ, whose nature and redemptive activity are dealt with later in the prophecy. Thus God provides the way back in Messiah.

Also, in chapter 1:3 God promises to return to His people, and in subsequent chapters He shows how He will work to deliver them. Notice especially:

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"
(Zech.4:6).

The power necessary for their restoration will be provided by Jehovah of hosts returning to His people in the strength of His Holy Spirit.

B - His Pervasive Power

As we read on in chapters 1 to 6, we notice that there are eight prophetic visions in which Jehovah of Hosts is unveiled to His people in pervasive power. In every case certain conditions are described which cause alarm, but the Lord announces His redemptive and corrective acts.

i) Ch.1:7-17 The Myrtle Trees symbolize the shadows of the people's existence, but the Angel portrays Jehovah's watchfulness. Here is revealed the Lord's displeasure with the nations that oppress His people, and assurance is given that He will return to Jerusalem with mercy and rebuild the Temple

"I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies...my house shall be built in it... a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem" (Zech.1:16,17).

ii) Ch.1:18-21 The Four Horns remind them of opposing forces, but the four carpenters (craftsmen) would assure them that God would provide greater forces to destroy those who afflict them. In v. 21 the principle is established that God will ultimately judge those who trouble His chosen people.

"These (carpenters) are come to ...cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it" (Zech.1:21).

iii) Ch.2:1-13 The Man with the Measuring Line measures Jerusalem and portrays a glorious future in the Messianic Kingdom. The city of that time will be too great to be walled in, but the Lord

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"will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zech.2:5).

iv) Ch.3:1-10 The Vision of Joshua the Priest being cleansed and recommissioned, but *"Satan stands at his right hand to resist him"*. This is symbolic of things to come, when *"the Branch"* (Christ) will remove the iniquity of the land *"in one day"* (v.9) and bring peace on earth.

"In that day...shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and the fig tree" (Zech.3:10).

v) Ch.4:1-14 The Candlestick and Two Olive Trees. The candlestick may be taken to represent Israel as a light to the nations. Supremely, the message of the olive oil representing the Holy Spirit is that only God's power can accomplish God's purposes. The same similitude is used by John in the Book of Revelation when he describes the two Jewish prophets in the Tribulation. No doubt they will have a role in the construction of the third temple just as these did in the building of the second temple. John says:

"These are the two olive trees...before the God of the earth" (Rev.11:4)

vi) Ch.5:1-4 The Flying Roll is explicitly stated to be the curse of judgment of God on sin. The roll, written on two sides as were Moses' tables of stone, depicts God's Law; the manward side (stealing) and the Godward side (swearing oaths). This was being fulfilled in Israel's experience. When Messiah came the Temple was a *"den of thieves"*, and the curse of God's Law consumed *"it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof"* in AD70 (Zech.5:4).

vii) Ch.5:5-11 The Ephah or measure, stands for something that has been filled up. The woman in the ephah is the personification of wickedness, especially the greed for gain in commerce. The other two women with wings are seen removing the ephah of iniquity to Babylonia, which is the seat of all idolatry and evil. There it will be judged, preliminary to the blessing of Israel and the bringing in of Messiah's righteous kingdom (cp Rev 17 & 18).

viii) Ch.6:1-8 The Four Chariots are explicitly stated to be

"the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth" (Zech.6:5).

Their mission is to judge and establish order and righteousness. They had completed the task of judging Babylon and *"quieted"* God's Spirit which had been stirred to anger *"in the north country"*. Another four horses are seen in Revelation chapter 6 preliminary to the bringing in of Messiah's righteous reign.

These eight visions as a whole represented God's all-pervasive power and the assurance of fulfilment of His promises for Israel, both in blessing and in judgment. Thus the prophet brought reassurance to God's people that they should get on with building the Temple, knowing that they were operating under God's power and direction. The following prophecies in the book continue that same lesson. The Lord has a persistent purpose to bless Israel through the coming King Messiah, who is at first rejected, but the rejected King returns and is exalted.

C. His Persistent Purpose

If we consider the eight visions of Zechariah in sequence we find they trace the outworking of God's purpose from that day until Israel is cleansed, redeemed and restored in the millennial age of Messiah's reign.

The same persistent purpose is further outlined in the successive prophecies of chapters 7-14, with the added emphasis of the activity of Messiah King and Deliverer. Blessing on Israel, however, is conditional, and they are exhorted to

"Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother" (Zech.7:9).

"Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour...and let none of you imagine evil in your heart against his neighbour" (Zech.8:16-17).

God's purpose is to bless Israel, and He says:

"Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain" (Zech.8:3).

"Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem" (Zech.8:22).

"In those days...ten men shall take hold...of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech.8:23).

In chapter 10, even the "lost ten tribes" will ultimately be brought back to the land, and God will *"save the house of Joseph"*(Zech.10:6).

Messiah's first advent is spoken of in Ch 9, which, as we now know, was fulfilled on Palm Sunday.

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee ...lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech.9:9).

Two shepherds of Israel are described in chapter 11. Jehovah's shepherd, our Lord Jesus, who would be rejected and sold for *"thirty*

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pieces of silver" which Judas would "cast... to the potter in the house of the Lord" (Zech.11:12-13). Then there would be the foolish (impious) shepherd, called the "idol shepherd"(Antichrist), who would come and tear the flock. The final message in chapters 12 to 14 foretells God's purpose for all nations in the Tribulation and millenia I kingdom. Jerusalem will become "a cup of trembling" and "a burdensome stone for all people" (Zech.12:2-3).

Then when Messiah returns Israel will look upon Him "whom they have pierced". A graphic picture is given of the moment when repentant Israel sees Messiah with the wounds of Calvary still apparent in His hands (Zech.13:6).

In the fierce persecution from Antichrist and the nations only one third of Israel will survive, but those who seek to destroy her will themselves be destroyed.

"In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" and "destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (Zech.12:8-9)

The great battle of Armageddon is described in chapter 14. This is the climax of the Day of the LORD, and the fulfilment of God's purposes for His people Israel.

"Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations... and his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zech.14:3-4).

Amazing scenes will accompany the coming of Messiah. Firstly, the mount of Olives will split from east to west leaving a great valley through which a fresh water stream will flow all the way through the Judaeen wilderness to the Dead Sea.

Secondly, the area surrounding Jerusalem will be changed:

"All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon" (v.10).

Finally, "the LORD shall be king over all the earth"(Zech.14:9). All false religions which have deluded men for millenniums will be put away, and "there shall be one LORD, and his name one" (Zech.14:9). In Christ's kingdom Temple worship will be restored and the believing Gentiles who survive the Great Tribulation will go up to Jerusalem year by year to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Our Lord is now rejected...but soon He'll come in glory...the hour is drawing nigh. **The crowning day is coming, by and by!**

MALACHI

The Unfailing Love of God - to an Unfaithful People



Malachi means, “My Messenger.” Although nothing is known of the personal history of Malachi, there is no good reason to doubt the existence of such a prophet or the genuineness of this book bearing his name. Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets in historic sequence, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit he effectively unites both Old and New Testaments. We may speak of Malachi as “The Bridge” in this regard. He refers back to Moses and seeks to recall God’s chosen people to obedience to the eternal counsel of God given by Moses (Ma1.4:4) and proclaimed by the prophets represented by Elijah (Ma1.4:5), while announcing the coming of John the Baptist, the Messenger of Ma1.3:1, whom Jesus identified with Elijah. (Matt.11:13-14; 17:10-13).

Although a silence of about four hundred years lies between Malachi and the voice of John the Baptist, yet the New Testament begins where the Old leaves off. We must therefore always think of both Testaments in an indissoluble relationship and as a continuing revelation, each one interpreting the other.

It is generally agreed that Malachi was contemporary with Nehemiah. Nehemiah made two excursions to Jerusalem, ie 445BC and 433BC. Malachi must have written about that time. If we compare the context of the Book of Nehemiah with this prophecy, we shall see that the conditions under which Nehemiah worked, and the sin of the people which angered him, are the same conditions and sins that Malachi dealt with. The condition of the people is revealed in a curious way by seven questions being asked through the prophecy:

“Wherein hast thou loved us?” (1:2).

“Wherein have we despised thy name?” (1:6).

“Wherein have we polluted thee?” (1:7).

“Wherein have we wearied him?” (2:17).

“Wherein shall we return?” (3:7).

“Wherein have we robbed thee?” (3:8).

“What have we spoken so much against thee?” (3:13).

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That word “*wherein*” really is a key to understanding the book, for here is a startling revelation of the people. Malachi charged them with seven sins, but they did not want to admit to any guilt. The people were insensitive to their own shortcomings. They were fulfilling all the external requirements of religion, but were insensitive to God Himself and His will. The master thought in Malachi is that of the unfailing grace of God to a calloused and unfaithful people. Under that general theme we find three matters which constitute a living message that is applicable to our own age as well:

- A. The unfailing love of Jehovah
- B. The appalling failure of humanity
- C. The secrets of strength for those who truly know their God.

A. The Unfailing Love of Jehovah

The opening words of this prophecy are almost startling:

“The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the Lord” (Malachi 1:1-2).

Our English language does not do justice to the forcefulness of the Hebrew verb, “loved.” The Hebrew verb is a compound of tenses, past, perfect and continuous. The statement in our English is merely past tense, “*I have loved you.*” The Hebrew marks continuity and may be rendered for our more accurate apprehension, “*I have loved, I do now love, and I will always love you, saith the Lord.*”

This opening statement of the prophecy becomes the burden of the entire book as it spells out the constancy of the love of God. With that background to this last page of inspired prophecy for four hundred years, we have this great eternal declaration, “the unfailing love of God.” There was no other voice until the herald of Malachi 3:1 announced:

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Clearly, Malachi’s message is a “bridge to Calvary.”

The message of judgment from Isaiah’s prophecy had almost died away, and Jeremiah’s lamentation was almost forgotten, but the last of the Old Covenant prophets comes declaring the love song of Jehovah. That is the master note of all prophecy and all ages, and is never to be silenced.

Shakespeare said,

“Love is not love that alters when it alternation finds.”

That may not always prove true on the human level, but it truly describes God’s love that does not alter when it alteration finds. In spite of everything in Israel’s chequered history of failure and sin, God still loved them.

Glance again at the occasions when the question “wherein” occurred, and you will find in every case it was asked in answer to some charge of sin which Malachi made against the people. Malachi charged them with ungrateful callousness, profanity, perversion, falsehood, apostasy, robbery and blasphemy. It is a terrible list, and yet in every case the messenger of God complained of these things because of the love of God’s heart.

Surely we miss a great truth if we fail to recognise that Malachi was endeavouring to show this people that the deepest sin, underlying all failure, is that it is a blow at the very heart of God. It is His love that is wounded. Malachi’s message reveals the consciousness and sensitiveness of God’s love in the presence of human sin and failure. That too is a revelation of what Calvary is all about.

B. The Appalling Failure of Humanity

By contrast we now look at the revelation of human failure. Malachi had of necessity to deal with this because God’s pure love cannot condone sin. If it did, it would not be true love. In every case of sin and failure, the root cause is that the people had failed in their love for God. Where there is love for God there will be no profanity or sacrilege or blasphemy or robbery or weariness. But with the loss of love for God, insensitiveness, apostasy and unfaithfulness had resulted.

Malachi came with his message, “*I have loved you, saith the Lord*”, but the people questioned, “*Wherein hast thou loved us?*” (Malachi 1:2). That is the inspiration of all sin, and when we consider this, we have no astonishment at all over all the other charges of failure which Malachi brought against this people. The hour in which we cease to appreciate and comprehend God’s love for us, our worship and service becomes form without power, and the consequences of failure and sin are inevitable.

It is true that the people of Malachi’s day had passed through bitter experiences. They had been carried as slaves into captivity,

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and though many of them had been allowed to return they were still subservient to a foreign power. Their city lacked its former glory. The rebuilt Temple was so inferior to the former one that old men wept over it.

It may have been that these experiences caused them to call in question the love of God. That attitude of mind is not unknown to us. We are sometimes inclined to ask, "Why does God allow us to suffer?" We need to guard our hearts as with a garrison against such questioning or doubting of the love of God. Such questioning never comes until our own love for Him has somehow waned and waxed cold.

The death of love in us can become callousness, and there follows a blunted and seared conscience even while the externals of religion are being maintained. To that condition in his day, Malachi declared the abiding fact of God's love. Love is the motive of His government and even of His judgments.

The people's questioning was due to the fact that by some failure in obedience and communion their own love had ceased to go out towards Him. It is when that is so, that we are inclined to question God's love toward us.

Malachi comes with the message that God is faithful to His promises, and still loves His people in spite of their sins. Hence we go from Malachi to the advent of our Saviour. We see God's love demonstrated through Christ at Calvary for a people who have failed. In the light of Calvary surely none can ever again say, "*Wherein hast thou loved us?*"

C. The Secrets of Strength for Those Who Know Their God.

Only a remnant of the people had returned from captivity, but within that remnant was another remnant. The days were chaotic and depressing in many respects, and the people were growing careless. Nevertheless, in the midst of these appalling conditions of depression and failure, there were those who were faithful and their portraiture as given in Malachi 3:16 to 4:2 is very revealing. Verse 16 states, "then they that feared the Lord." We note the word "THEN."

It was when the people had lost their sense of God's love, when they had grown careless and were saying, "There is a weariness in serving God," then there was a little group of people radiantly

loyal to God, and the secrets of their distinctive character are told us. Two specific things are named:

1. They spake often one to another. The prophet is describing constant unbroken fellowship with each other. What did they talk about? The answer comes in the second description.

2. They thought upon His Name. Their conversation was the result of their thinking on God's Name. The verb thought means literally "to consider its value or take an inventory". These people were taking an inventory of their wealth in the Name. They had very little else left to think of. The grandeur of their nation was perished, but there was left to them life's one greatest treasure. Proverbs 18:10 says,

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe."

If we go across Malachi's bridge to the New Covenant we recall Peter's words in Acts 4:12, "...there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." So we note that when all else failed, when the nation had declined, they took an inventory of the Name, counted it as their wealth, and discovered how blessed and wealthy they really were.

This is followed by a lovely revelation of the Lord's response to their thought and conversation about Him, which is described in V16 by two pictorial metaphors:

1. The Lord "HEARKENED." This is an animal metaphor and means "to prick the ears", as the horse when being driven might prick its ears to catch any word from the driver's lips.

2. The Lord "HEARD." This means a bending over, with close attention, so that no sound may be missed, as a mother would bend low to miss no syllable of her infant's prattle.

So God, when these people were talking together as a result of thinking upon His Name, was listening. We are reminded of Jesus words in Matthew 18:19-20, about two or three gathered in His Name and in agreement together. Two or three of His people never meet together to speak about what the Name means to them, but that He hearkens and hears. This is a truly great encouragement, and a further secret of strength and confidence in the midst of decadence.

A further secret of strength for God's faithful ones is the promise given to the remnant in Malachi 3:16-17.

"A book of remembrance was written before him for them."

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This book compares favourably with the Lamb's Book of Life mentioned in Revelation 20:12-15. There is real security in having one's name recorded in this book, as we see from Rev 20:15. So it is that Malachi adds, *"They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them."* Commentary of "that day" then follows.

Look particularly at Ma1.4:1-2. Surely here in this promised Day of the Lord is a secret of strength to those who fear His Name. Notice that "that day" is prophesied to have two contrasting effects. When that day comes it will burn and destroy the proud and wicked just as a tree that has no river resources. But by contrast, in that day the Lord will be the Sun of Righteousness bringing healing and growth to the faithful remnant of His people. So the prophet bade Israel look on to "that day" and act in accordance with the vision. He writes:

"Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble:and the day that cometh shall burn them up...BUT unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings...And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the sales of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts" (Malachi.4:1-3).

What is our attitude towards "that day?" That is the supreme test of our position. Interestingly, the last word of the Old Testament economy was about the coming Day of the Lord, so also is the last word of the New Testament economy.

"He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly" (Rev.22:20).

The attitude of people toward that day determines their ultimate destiny. For the Church, the Day of the LORD holds no fears, for we will be raptured before that awful day shall come. For the world of the ungodly, however, it will come as a thief in the night.

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess.5:3).

Let us therefore fear the Lord, putting our trust in His saving name, while we wait for the dawning of that great day, that we may not be ashamed at His coming.