



Expository Preaching from the Minor Prophets

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Training the Next Generation of Servant Leaders in Africa for Great Commission Living

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Introductory Lecture – Part 1
Background and Role of the Hebrew Minor Prophets

One of the most neglected and least understood sections of the Bible is the section known as the Minor Prophets. Many Christians are uncomfortable with this section of their Bibles – they are highly unfamiliar with the men who prophesied and even less comfortable and knowledgeable about the content of the books that bear their names.

Confusion is added to confusion when one tries to figure out what prophet spoke to what kingdom (North/Israel or South/Judah) or who exactly was king over what and what other prophets were ministering as contemporaries.

Others have honestly neglected these books because they have concluded that since they are “minor” prophets, their message is somehow less important than the message of other more “important” prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or even Daniel.

At the end of the day, there is a desperate need for a reawakening of interest and familiarity with these men and their message. They ministered to Israel in her darkest hours and as stood as God’s representatives in the midst of a spiritually dark and darkening world – like Israel of old, the modern church stands in desperate need of the kind of preaching and ministry that these ancient prophets had among Israel.

The prophecies of the 12 minor prophets are contained in the 2nd division of the Hebrew Bible.

A. Law B. Prophets C. Writings

In this second division, Prophets, the writings of these 12 men are all treated as one book called by the title, “Book of the Twelve”

In most Hebrew Bibles, these prophecies appear in unbroken sequence rather than 12 separate and distinct books. Their material is arranged in 21 segments called the “sedarim” to help in public reading such as would often happen in the Synagogues.

Because of their size, they were bound together in one volume and simply regarded as one book. For the most part, our Hebrew Bible tends to arrange them roughly in their chronological order. They ministered over a broad period of time starting with the period of time under the Assyrian Kingdom leading up to the destruction of Israel in the North 722 B.C. and going all the way up to after the reconstruction of the Temple in Judah and the time of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah in 435 B. C.

Who were these men and what was their message to God’s people? In all of the varied circumstances surrounding them and the pressures and problems they faced and addressed one thing is clear – these men were God’s men and they spoke God’s message to His people.

I. The Nature and Role of the Hebrew Prophets

“To be a prophet is both a distinction and an affliction” (Abraham Heschel – The Prophets, Vol 1, pp. 17-18).

The written records of Hebrew prophecy present the prophets as normal people who preached to diverse audiences in a wide variety of settings.

These men came from all walks of life and from all levels of society – they came as the divinely called and commissioned and appointed spokesmen of God to declare His message to a specific audience that He sent them to.

This office was one of three specific spiritual offices that God established and that developed under God’s divine leading in Israel’s History.

- A. Priest** – represented man to God. His primary function was sacerdotal – offering of sacrifices and the leading of organized worship. He was charged with preserving the worship of God and the Word of God. This also involved an important teaching ministry among the people.
- B. King** – ruled man under God. He did not oversee the sacrifice nor lead in public worship – instead, he was the first or chief worshiper! He was to model to the people what they were to be in worship and in walk before God (Ps. 19). Although God did use some Kings to speak on his behalf and even to write inspired Scripture (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) their primary role was to govern the people politically and to protect and advance the kingdom over which they had been placed. They were to govern and rule in such a way that the people would stay loyal to God and obedient to His word.
- C. Prophets** – these men primarily spoke to men on behalf of God. Priest spoke to God on behalf of Men. King ruled men under God. Prophet spoke to men (including and often specifically to priests and kings) on behalf of God or as God’s mouthpiece. As such, the content and the authority of his message was not his own but God’s. His was a derived message and a delegated authority.

D. 4 key Terms used to describe this office:

- 1. *Man of God* – reference to His life and character (call of God)**

This term primarily referred to the special commission and setting apart of this individual by God to be His appointed spokesman.

He was to be a loyal and obedient citizen under the authority of the King – but he was not the “King’s man” – he was not to be intimidated by the King’s authority nor was he to back away from speaking all of God’s words to the king even when the king would not be pleased by what he heard.

As God’s man, he was under obligation first and foremost to God – his first loyalty was to God. Come what may, he was to line up on God’s side. He was God’s man.

2. *Seer (I Sam 9:9) – reference to special knowledge (word of God)*

This term refers to the idea that God called prophets would often have extraordinary insight into God’s Word or the affairs and matters of men. This insight would come directly from God and not as a result of heightened human intelligence.

He was privileged to be the recipient of supernatural insight or wisdom from God as a result of direct revelation.

3. *Visionary – (closely associated with the term “seer”)*

This term was least used and when it was employed it generally referred to a specific means by which God would give the prophet revelation. That means (among others) would be that of a vision. Sometimes the prophet would be an active participation in the vision much like Ezekiel and Jeremiah were while at other times, the prophet would be a passive observer in the vision that God gave him.

4. *Prophet – speaks of his activity for God (task from God)*

This term comes from an Akkadian root that means “to speak”

This term came to refer to those men who had been called by God, commissioned and set apart by God, and appointed to speak a specific message from God to His people. Hence, they became known as “nabi’s or Prophets – Speakers.”

This became the most general and familiar term for a Hebrew Prophet by the time their messages were being written down and preserved for Israel.

The passage in I Samuel 9:9 demonstrates that the earliest prophets were not generally called by this term but were known as seers. This most likely changed during the rise of the Monarchy under Samuel. By the time that the kingdom has been divided and Elijah starts the “school of the prophets” the term “prophet” is the common term for this office.

E. Example from OT Passage – Exodus 7:1

Aaron is called the “prophet of Moses” – his spokesman. Exodus 4:15 explains where Aaron would get his words – from Moses who would get them from God. Aaron was to speak Moses’ words!

In this analogy/picture: Moses represents God
 Aaron represents the prophet who would only speak God’s words.

F. Recognizing a true prophet

There were many prophets in Israel. Some were named prophets while others were unnamed. All would claim to be God’s prophet – a true prophet and not a false one. But – how would the people know?

2 key marks of a true prophet:

1. His prophecies would come true – they would be proven right! Jeremiah predicting victory for Babylon and defeat for Jerusalem over and against the False prophets who were predicting peace. Ultimately, Jeremiah would be proven right.

However, some of the prophecies would take a long time to come to pass. While this was an important and vital test – it was not an immediate test.

2. His life would be lived in conformity to the Law of God. Since he was a voice for God and he spoke God’s word – then his life needed to be lived in such a way that it would reflect obedience and loyalty to God and His Word.

G. The Activity or Content of Prophetic Speech

1. *Preaching*

The prophet as a messenger from God is seen in the OT primarily as a preacher.

Whereas the priest is seen more as a teacher informing God's people about the precepts and principles of God's law, the prophet is seen as a preacher calling men and women to obey God's law!

The prophet addressed himself to the entire nation and at times to nations and his specific goal was to preach and call for a response – not just to inform.

The purpose of prophecy is to produce a response in the hearers. The response to prophecy – is to produce holiness or to receive comfort in the midst of the present circumstance.

The prophets were primarily Reformers – and not innovators. They wanted to bring God's people back to God and His Law. They were testers and evaluators of God's people. They were watchmen observing and warning of the God's activity and what was to come. And at times, they were intercessors – from God to the people pleading for repentance; from the people to God – pleading for forgiveness and mercy.

2. *Predicting*

Not only did they forthtell or preach/declare God's message to His people, they often predicted God's plan for the future.

They were not writing with “historical hindsight” – this was genuine predictive material that could only be known by direct revelation. (Greatest and most familiar example is Micah 5 and the prediction of the very village where the Lord would be born.)

Generally the prophets did not predict the future just so that people could know what was coming – to gain financial benefit or to somehow get an upper hand or perceived advantage. They predicted for 2 very important reasons:

- a. To warn of God's coming judgment
- b. To assure or comfort of God's sure mercy

Behind all of predictive prophecy is the character of God.

- a. His Omniscience – this is what makes Him different than Idols. He actually knows the future before it happens – in fact, he actually causes the future to happen.
- b. His Omnipotent Sovereignty – the prophets want to make sure that the hearers know that God is in control of all things – even future things!
- c. His Justice and Righteousness – God will not let sin go unpunished.
- d. His Mercy and Love – God is constantly wanting people to repent. He would rather show mercy than judgment. Often, even in judgment, He shows mercy.
- e. His Faithfulness – even when it looks like God was judging Israel – He had not forgotten His promise to make them a great nation or to keep them as His eternal possession!

Bottom line, the prophets were trying to help the people get a proper view of God. Most of our problems in life come as a result of us having a flawed view of God.

Sometimes that flawed view comes out of ignorance – but often it comes out of stubborn unwillingness to give up sin.

The message of the prophets is that God is God and there is no other. We are to line up our life with His plan and not He to ours. God is not a “genie” that we manipulate to our convenience or advantage. He is an awesome and yet loving God and we exist to glorify Him and to serve him!

At the end of the day – the purpose of all prophecy is to draw us to God and to motivate us to love Him more passionately, live for Him more faithfully, and serve Him more fervently. Prophecy is more about motivating me for service and obedience today than it is about satisfying my curiosity about tomorrow!

II. The Background and Setting of the Hebrew Prophets

The prophets did not ministry in a cultural or historical vacuum. Nor did they minister in isolation from the religious and political forces surrounding them

In order to rightly understand the ministry and message of these prophets individually, one must understand the cultural and historical setting that the specific prophet message was addressing.

However, first, some general observations:

1. The Prophets spoke to Israel in times of moral, political, or spiritual crisis. In fact, it can be argued that had there been no crisis, there would have been no real need for the Prophetic message.
2. The Prophets generally addressed Israel specifically. Although there are certain exceptions (Jonah and Nineveh; prophecies against Edom; etc.) the messages are primarily intended for Israel.

Even the messages to other nations are recorded for Israel so that she might be warned or comforted in what God was about to do.

3. The Prophets generally addressed the nation as a whole rather than the individual in particular. While individuals were to respond and repent, the message is generally addressed to the nation or to a group.
4. The prophets frequently found themselves at odds with the national (kings) and spiritual (priests) leadership of Israel. Much of their preaching and predicting was directed at these two groups – the political and spiritual leadership of God’s people.

All of this has great bearing on our understanding of the message and its historical intent and theological impact.

A. Culturally

In order to effectively understand and rightly interpret the prophets, one must understand the cultural context of the message in that Prophet’s day.

Culture: the learned behavior and thought patterns that have been acquired and are shared by a group of people that shape the values and actions of their specific society.

Note the following observations that impact the cultural background:

1. First, the prophets were ministering in Israel over a broad spectrum of time and different cultural influences were developing.
 - a. Early prophets ministered with no monarch
 - 1) Moses – He was both prophet and leader

- 2) Samuel – He was under judges
 - b. Later prophets ministered under monarchy
 - c. Some prophets ministered under divided monarchy
2. Second, the prophets were often times ministering under different world views that had come to power.
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Assyria (Jonah and Nahum)
 - c. Babylon (Daniel)
 - d. Persia (Haggai and Zechariah)
 - e. Greece (Malachi)
3. Third, the prophets at times were dealing with different political influences that had shaped and affected Israel.
 - a. Some prophets dealt with Israel as she was becoming a nation.
 - b. Some prophets had to deal with Israel she was becoming a divided nation.
 - c. Some prophets had to deal with Assyrian influence where others had to deal with Babylonian influence.
 - d. Some ministered when Israel was strong and others when she was weak nationally, politically, and spiritually.
4. Fourth, the prophets were dealing at times with different societal feelings toward the world around them.
 - a. Some prophets were ministering to people who hated the influence of the power around them (Babylon and Assyria).
 - b. Some prophets were ministering to people who had actually been deported away from Jerusalem and had deeply bought into the value system of Babylon or Assyria.
5. Fifth, the prophets were dealing with differences among Israel itself.
 - a. Some prophets ministered to the North and others to the South
 - b. Some prophets from the North went to the South and some from the South to the North.

- c. Some prophets ministered in times of great prosperity and military strength others in times of trouble and famine.
- 6. Finally, the prophets had to deal with various religious and spiritual influences that affected Israel.
 - a. United temple worship in Jerusalem
 - b. Divided Jehovah worship with a Temple in Jerusalem and competing Shrines in Dan and Bethel.
 - c. Different false god's and influences (Baal, Astheroth, Molech, etc.)
 - d. Different time periods in relationship to idolatry in Israel's history
 - i.e. Before captivity a love affair with idols (Ezekiel) after captivity, idols a diminishing problem

B. Historically

The era of Hebrew prophecy began with Elijah and ended with John the Baptist, who came in the Spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

The Historical background of the Hebrew Prophets revolves around four key turning points of major world events:

1. Urbanization of Israel

After Jereboam II came to power in the North and Uzziah came to power in the South (Isaiah's time) and important societal shift began to take place – urbanization.

Kings had established and solidified their power. In order to keep it, they began to organize society and to build cities. Slow but surely the nation of Israel began to move away from their nomadic farmer/shepherd society to a more urbanized and mercantile society.

As they began to develop relationships – particularly trade and merchanting relationship with other nations, they became increasingly influenced by the outside world – particularly by their immoral lifestyle and their idolatrous worship.

As this began to pollute and pervert Israel's religious life by leading the nation into Idolatry – the ministry of the prophetic message became necessary. It was during this time in Israel's

history that the prophetic order was officially established under Elijah.

2. Rise of Assyria as a World Power

As world dominance shifted away from Egypt, Assyria came into power. Assyria dominated the world and as a result – the world was dramatically changed.

Assyria was aggressive and blatantly cruel and wicked. Due to Israel's strategic location, there were frequent encounters with Assyrian culture and influence.

Eventually, God would use this wicked world power to judge His people for their faithless idolatry.

In view of the coming captivity of the 10 tribes of the North and the mass deportation that Assyria would effect on her, the need for prophetic ministry became even more urgent.

- a. To warn and warn and warn Israel of the coming judgment.
- b. To take God's Word in written form with them into their period of captivity.

It was during this period that the ministry of the writing prophets began.

3. The Northern Captivity by Assyria (722 B.C.) and the Southern Captivity by Babylon (586 B.C.)

Shortly after Assyria destroyed the 10 Northern tribes, Babylonia began a series of deportations of the Southern two tribes that ultimately ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the mass deportation of her citizens to Babylon in 586 B.C.

However, whereas the Assyrians were cruel and harsh and caused the 10 Northern tribes to hate them and to resist their influence, the Babylonians treated the Jewish captives with kindness.

They allowed them to build homes and to set up families and to resume some semblance of normal life – only in Babylon.

At the end of the 70 years, the Jewish captives had become so comfortable with Babylonian life and culture, that only a few (50,000) were even willing to return to rebuild their city.

They settled down, became wealthy, became educated in the Babylonian ways, and in some cases rose to positions of power and prestige. God's people had grown comfortable in their exile. As a result, they needed specific prophets to stir them up and remind them that this was not God's final plan or place for them.

So, God sent the Exile prophets to challenge the people and to warn them against growing comfortable in captivity.

4. Return and Restoration of Jerusalem

Finally, after 70 years of captivity – God began to orchestrate events so that His people could return to their land and rebuild their city and His temple. However, those that returned soon grew discouraged at the monumental task.

They grew tired of the opposition and soon left off the rebuilding task.

They desperately needed God's prophets to remind them and encourage them and rebuke them and motivate them to finish what God had called them to start.

Perhaps the saddest and lowest point was the discouragement they faced in rebuilding their temple – how could this poor building even when completed even begin to compare with the original temple of Solomon?

They needed prophets to remind them that their new temple would be far greater than Solomon – it would have a beauty that Solomon's never had – it would see Messiah!

C. Politically, Religiously, Socially

1. *Politically: Of Prophets and Kings*

The prophets were no pawns or playthings of the Kings. In fact, true prophets often found themselves rebuking the King in power for leading the nation astray from God's word.

The prophetic task involved calling the national leadership to accountability morally and spiritually. Their message was

often very uncomfortable – they stood against the misuse of power and social injustice that the kings and political leaders often engaged in to further their own wealth.

They did not strive to be politically correct – they were more interested in being theologically correct.

They saw the authority of the monarchy tied to the covenant of God as expressed and explained in the Law of God – and as such, they believed they were actually standing for the monarchy when they rebuked wicked Kings who undermined or destroyed the very things that were its foundation.

In other words, they believed that they were being loyal to the monarchy when they preached against a King who was living and leading the nation into disobedience that God would ultimately have to judge.

Most importantly, they did not speak their own feelings or message on the particular point in question – they had been called by God to deliver a particular message that came from a higher authority – God who had established the kingdom and the king!

2. *Religiously – Of Prophets, priests and gods*

At the heart of the Prophetic message was the idea and conviction that God demanded and deserved exclusive worship from his people.

Therefore, the fact that Israel continued to worship God while adding in little by little the worship of other gods was unacceptable to the prophets.

Not just worshiping the wrong gods – (idolatry) but worshiping the right God but in the wrong way – (compromise) was soundly condemned.

At the heart of this idolatry were priests who were willing to compromise and as such, often the Prophet found himself standing against the established priesthood.

3. *Socially – Of Prophets, widows, and orphans*

The prophets were not social reformers – they were theological reformers.

However, at the heart of God's covenant was obedience to His stated laws – and His stated laws had much to say about the treatment and provision of the poor, especially of the widow and orphan.

As Israel began to settle into cities – social classes began to develop. There were the rich and the poor. Generally speaking, as Israel began to depart from obeying God's Word, the rich started to use the poor to become richer.

This was an external picture of a much deeper spiritual problem – as they were using the poor for their own ends, so they were using God as a spiritual good luck charm.

The prophets were not out to primarily change society and address social ills (although they did so). They were out to call people of all classes back to a right relationship with God and this involved right relationships with one another.

Society was only a picture of the real problem that was wrong with Israel theological. They were a society that was not right with God and as a result were not right with each other. Instead of loving and caring for each other they were using and oppressing anyone weaker than themselves.

Instead of stepping in to stop this horrible behavior, the Kings and the Priests were leaders in this sin! So, the prophets stepped in with an evaluation and a warning from God who saw all that was going on!

Since the Kings would not defend and protect the weak and the helpless, God would do so Himself. Since the priests would not intercede on their behalf, God would Himself become their intercessor and plead their case for justice and right treatment.

III. The Chronology of the Hebrew Prophets

A. Overview

Generally speaking from Elijah to Malachi – from the 8th century BC to the 5th.

These prophets are known as the writing prophets or literary prophets because their prophecies were generally written down almost immediately as they were given.

Chronologically can be arranged into 3 groups around 3 primary historical periods:

1. Group 1: Pre-Assyrian or Neo-Assyrian

This group is comprised of the earliest prophets who prophesied and gave attention to the events that led up to the Assyrian captivity of the Northern tribes in 722 B.C. and to the conditions following that fall.

Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah make up this group. Interestingly, Jonah is a part of this group and he issues a warning to the Assyrian nation.

2. Group 2: Pre-Babylonian or Neo-Babylonian Prophets

This group is comprised of prophets that marked out the circumstances that led up to the Babylonian captivity of Judah and the circumstances that followed during the captivity. They are also called the Exile prophets.

Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Nahum, Ezekiel, and Obadiah.

3. Group 3: Post - Exile or Persian Period Prophets

This group ministered during and after the exile to a nation that needed to be reminded, encouraged, and exhorted to rebuild what had been destroyed.

Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi.

B. Specifically

It is hard to establish the specific dates exactly for many of the Minor Prophets. Many different chronologies have been proposed by different prophetic scholars.

Two conservative schemes follow below:

1. John Phillips (both major and minor prophets)

a)	Elijah	? - 852
b)	Elisha	852-795
c)	Joel	830-820
d)	Jonah	785-770
e)	Amos	765-755
f)	Hosea	755-715
g)	Isaiah	739-690
h)	Micah	736-700
i)	Nahum	645-620
j)	Zephaniah	635-625
k)	Jeremiah	627-575
l)	Habakkuk	620-610
m)	Daniel	605-536
n)	Ezekiel	593-572
o)	Obadiah	592-572
p)	Zechariah	520-490
q)	Haggai	520-505
r)	Malachi	435-395

2. John McArthur (both major and minor prophets)

a.	Obadiah	850-840	Edom
b.	Joel	835-796	Judah
c.	Jonah	784-774	Nineveh
d.	Amos	763-755	Israel
e.	Hosea	755-710	Israel
f.	Isaiah	739-680	Judah
g.	Micah	735-710	Judah
h.	Nahum	650-630	Nineveh
i.	Zephaniah	635-625	Judah
j.	Jeremiah	627-570	Judah
k.	Habakkuk	620-605	Judah
l.	Daniel	605-536	Judah/Babylon
m.	Ezekiel	593-570	Judah/Babylon
n.	Haggai	520-505	Judah
o.	Zechariah	520-470	Judah
p.	Malachi	437-417	Judah

Note: In MacArthur's scheme:

1. Obadiah and Joel ministered at the same time that Elisha did.
2. Jonah and Nahum both preached to Nineveh about 100 apart.

3. Micah and Hosea ministered at the same time as Isaiah
4. Nahum and Zephaniah ministered at the early part of Jeremiah's ministry
5. Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel overlapped
6. Zechariah and Haggai ministered together
7. Malachi probably ministered during Nehemiah's final years

IV. The Structure, Outline, and Message of the Minor Prophets

A. Joel: *Yahweh is God*

"Call on the Lord for His Day is Near!"

1. Plague of Locusts as a type of the Day of the Lord (1-2)
2. Promise of Blessing from the Lord (3)
3. The Day of the Lord (4)

B. Jonah: *Dove*

"Should God be Compassionate/Merciful to Everyone?"

1. His refusal of God's call (1)
2. His Praise for God's Deliverance (2)
3. Repentance at Nineveh (3)
4. Jonah's Grief (4)

C. Amos: *Burden - Bearer*

"What Shall We Do – The End has come!"

1. Eight burdens against the nations (1-2)
2. Offenses of Israel and Warnings from God (3-6)
3. Five Visions of Judgment (7-9)

D. Hosea: *Salvation*

"Can Anyone Love a Prostitute?"

1. Hosea's marriage symbolizes the nation (1-3)
2. Ungodliness and punishment of Israel (4-12)
3. Promise of Restoration and Blessing (13-14)

E. Micah: Who is Like Yahweh?

“Justice will triumph”

1. Prophecy of judgment (1-3)
2. Prophecy of Kingdom (4-5)
3. God’s controversy with His people and His final mercy (6-7)

F. Nahum : Consolation or Consoler

Where is God’s Goodness and Wrath?

1. Psalm of God’s majesty (1)
2. Prophecy of the doom and fall of Ninevah (2-3)

G. Zephaniah: Yahweh has hidden or Yahweh protests

“Seek God before the Day of the Lord”

1. Judgment upon Judah (1)
2. Judgment upon the Nations (2)
3. Future Kingdom (3)

H. Habakkuk: Ardent Embrace

Living by Faith

1. Problems of Faith (1-2)
2. Prayer of Faith (3)

I. Haggai: Festal

“What are your Priorities?”

1. Summons to rebuild the Temple (1)
2. Glory of the Temple and blessings of the new era (2)

J. Zechariah: Yahweh remembers

What are God’s purposes?

1. Call for repentance (1)
2. Eight visions (1-6)
3. God’s Message regarding Fasting (7-8)
4. First advent and rejection of Messiah/King (9-11)

5. Second advent and reception of Messiah/King (12-14)

K. Malachi: My Messenger

Whom do you Honor?

1. God's love for Israel (1)
2. Oracle against the priests (1-2)
3. Oracle against the laymen (2-4)
4. Final Warning (4)

Minor Prophets

Samuel Horn, Ph.D.

Fall 2012

Introductory Lecture – Part 2

The Development of the Prophetic Tradition in Israel's History^a

Introduction:

Who were the Hebrew prophets? Hundreds of years after they lived and spoke, these men would be described by the Apostle Peter as *holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (II Peter 1:21). This inspired description contains all the key elements to understanding these men and their mission from God.

First, they were men. They lived and dwelt among the people to whom they preached. They were men of their times. They understood and were part of the historical, cultural, and religious context of their world. They came not as outsiders making clinical observations and abstract pronouncements but as passionately loyal citizens who deeply loved God, covenant, and country. For them, the stakes were high; they were not playing for trifles.

Second, they were men of God. As deep as love for country, safety, peace, and the pursuit of happiness may have been, even deeper was their commitment to God and His covenant. Because of their loyalty to God and His government, they often found themselves at odds with authorities who perverted the divine intent of their office. They were not the “king’s men” but God’s. Functioning as court counselors to guide the king in the path of righteousness, they often found themselves on opposing sides from kings who were bent on advancing their own cause in their own way. Their first and primary loyalty was to God and at times, this loyalty was costly.

Third, they were holy men. One of the key identifying marks of a true prophet of God was that he lived his life in conformity to the Law that he preached. His life was lived in the fear and reverence of the God Who had called him. True prophets of God lived lives that were more often than not in stark contrast to those of the false prophets, priests, and princes of the day. One might reject their message and even their ministry, but it would not be on the grounds of godless conduct. Their lives matched their message.

^a Most of the material in this lecture is condensed, reworked, and rearranged from Willem A. VanGemenen’s *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990. His work provides an extensive treatment of the OT prophetic phenomenon from a conservative perspective. While one will not agree with all of his conclusions, VanGemenen’s work is certainly a must read for the serious student of the OT prophetic literature.

Forth, they spoke. The primary activity of a true prophet of God was proclaiming God's Word in a clear, accurate, bold, and authoritative manner. No matter who the audience or what the consequence, God's prophet was responsible to preach God's message. This message was more important than personal safety or even life itself. Because modern believers read the prophetic messages, we often fail to remember that their primary audience heard them as vivid and passionate proclamations powerfully preached by a spirit-anointed preacher. As wonderful as reading a message preached by Spurgeon might be, it can't compare to what it must have been like to have been in the front row of the London Tabernacle hearing that same message preached! This is a small and feeble comparison to our reading the prophets. We must resist the danger of simply reading the prophets only written words, becoming overly enamored with literary devices (as helpful as they are), and reducing the message to cleverly arranged chiasmic structures and poetic devices. These were first and foremost powerful, passionate, and moving sermons boldly declared to God's people by His preachers.

Fifth, they were empowered and directed by the Spirit. Their message was not their own but God's. What they spoke, when they spoke, where and how they spoke, and even to whom they spoke was all carefully orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in addition to being men in and of their times, they were also men who spoke out of and beyond their times. These men were given authoritative and accurate information from God about His plans for the future, and they were told to declare it to God's people well in advance. At times, they spoke of things they would not personally see in their lifetimes. All of them believe that one day they would see in person what they saw in prophetic vision from God and by His grace, they will.

One individual defined the Hebrew prophets as:

...persons whose entire life-style (words and actions) was [sic] submitted to God's purposes and empowered by the Spirit and who served variously as (1) God's channel of revelatory information to the subjects of the mediatorial kingdom, (2) exhorters of obedience to mediatorial kingdom regulations, and (3) pointers to the coming Messiah whose work would merge the rulership of the mediatorial kingdom and the office of God's spokesman in that kingdom into one person.^b

Although this definition perhaps ties the prophetic role too narrowly to the mediatorial kingdom, none-the-less it does give a concise overall perspective on the character and mission of a true Old Testament prophet.^c In short, a true prophet was a spirit-

^bR. Manahan, "Prophetic Office in Historical Perspective" (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977) 135-36.

^c While the OT prophet certainly did have intimate connection to the mediatorial kingdom of God, to define his role strictly in terms of the mediatorial kingdom does not fully account for all aspects of his office. For example, Moses was a type of the promised Prophet who would come, but he was also a prophet in his own right before

empowered and directed messenger sent from God to call His people to return to Himself.

I. Prophetic Context and Characterization:

The context in which the prophets ministered was both unique to the age and time yet similar in that the same basic issue was at work in the societal and cultural context in which each prophet ministered. Simply put, this context was in reality a matrix consisting of four specific elements: God's revelation, Man's alternative religion, the popular voice of the people (*vox populi*), and the pragmatic solutions to societies complex problems (*realpolitik*).

A. Understanding the religious structure of the pagan nations

All the pagan nations surrounding Israel had a world-view or a structure for understanding their world – how it came into being, how it is structured and ordered, and how supernatural events relate to this world-view. The resulting world-view of a particular culture is called cosmology and it is at the heart of that nation's culture. To explain its cosmology, each nation had set stories or explanations by which they understood the context of the world. This set of stories or explanations became known as mythology. The myths of a particular culture provided the key for interpreting the historical, societal, political, and religious norms of that culture.

In light of the explanation provided by their particular mythology, a culture would often devise a methodology in order to attempt to predict, control, or manipulate the supernatural world around them. These means of predicting and controlling events became known as divination and magic respectively. Typically magic and divination utilized whatever means were deemed necessary in order to achieve a desired result – in other words, these nations practiced something called *realpolitik*. *Realpolitik* was

the official kingdom was established. Samuel was a prophet before and after the kingdom was established. Additionally, there were prophets who were sent to declare God's judgment or mercy on other nations. While one can certainly argue that those nations were judged in connection to their association and actions toward Israel, it is clear that at that particular time in history, they were not part of the mediatorial kingdom of God (as mediatorial kingdom is normally and primarily defined). If by mediatorial kingdom one means the rule of God over His creation and His sovereign control over all the nations, then the prophets were all tied primarily to the mediatorial kingdom. However, normally this term is reserved to depict God's direct governance of His people and specifically through the establishment of the Davidic throne. In this sense, there were prophets who were certainly tied to Israel and the theocratic covenantal government by God under His appointed regents (Moses, Judges, Kings), but who also at times were directed to minister in circumstances or places outside this specific context where their prophecy would have only indirect reference to the nation (i.e. in the form of comfort as in Nahum's pronouncement of God's wrath on Nineveh).

an organized and structured way of utilizing any available means to manipulate or control events toward a desired outcome. For example, a nation who desired to conquer another nation might determine to adopt the worship of the nation being attacked in order to gain favor or appease the gods of the people they were attacking. Even though they had not worshipped this way in the past, this was viewed as a viable means of controlling events toward a desired outcome – hence *realpolitik* at work. By the same means, a nation whose gods were not powerful enough to deliver them from their enemies might find themselves adding another god to their pantheon or changing gods completely. Another expression of *realpolitik* was the political and religious alliances made between nations to advance the cause of both nations by blurring key national, religious, cultural, or political distinctives. All of this was done in an effort to in some way manipulate events toward a desired outcome.

The cosmology, mythology, divination/magic, and *realpolitik* of a nation were the collective expression of the beliefs and traditions of the people. This expression of the culture of the people as a whole became known as the “*vox populi*” or the voice of the people. Anyone who went against the collective wisdom of the people became an instant threat to the safety and security of that nation.

At its core, the cosmology and the resulting *realpolitik/vox populi* of a nation were religious. These elements were consistently reflected in religious activities and speeches and were eventually formed into rituals, ceremonies, and prayers to a particular god or gods. In essence this became the religion or worship of the people comprising that nation. Each nation had its unique religion or worship – however, one of the effects of intermingling with other nations was the syncretism of the religion and worship of each individual nation. Nations interacted politically through alliances, militarily through wars and invasions, economically through commerce and trade, and socially through intermarriage and repopulation. All of these points of contact would bring about a syncretistic approach to the religion of each nation. While each nation had its own set of religious practices and a particular god or gods to which that worship was directed, there were many areas of overlap or similarity and a newcomer to the nation would not find it hard to adapt to his new religious environment.

B. Israel’s distinct religious position among the nations

God had chosen Israel from among the nations and she was to be distinct from the nations around her. In contrast to the false pagan cosmology surrounding her, God had given Israel a true and reliable understanding of how the world worked. Behind all events and circumstances was the hand of an omnipotent, omnipresence, omniscient, personal, holy, and loving God. Additionally, God had revealed Himself to Israel in unique and authoritative revelation – the Torah. Rather than mythology created by men to explain the workings of their world, they had been given the real story by means of authoritative revelation from the Creator. Rather than resorting to magic and divination in an effort to control present and future events, they were to live faithfully according to the revelation that God had given them – this revelation would be their wisdom (Dt. 4:6) before the nations. By it, Israel would gain the skill

and ability necessary to flourish on earth. If Israel would walk in all the ways revealed in this divine revelation and not depart from its prescribed path to the right or to the left, then whatsoever she did would prosper (Josh 1:8). Rather than relying on the pragmatic “*realpolitik*” commonly practiced by the surrounding nations, Israel was to rely solely on the Lord her God. Rather than listening to the “*vox populi*,” Israel was to heed the only voice that mattered – God’s. Instead of adopting a practice of accommodation and syncretism, Israel was to maintain a distinct identity in every respect especially religion and politics. In other words, Israel was to present a divine counterculture to that of the surrounding nations.

C. *Israel’s syncretistic approach to revelation and religion*

To the extent that Israel maintained her distinct identity and demonstrated loyalty to God by faithfully living in light of His revelation and by rejecting the cosmology and *realpolitik* of the nations around her, she enjoyed God’s protection and divine blessing. However, to the extent that she chose adopt the ways of the nations, she lost God’s favor and became instead the recipient of His disfavor.

Sadly, Israel had an ongoing love affair with the culture and cosmology of the surrounding nations. She consistently adopted a syncretistic approach in the development of her national life. Israel’s demand for a monarchy was motivated by a desire to adopt the standard practice of the surrounding nations. She consistently polluted the true worship of God by mixing in the false worship and pagan practices of foreign nations. Israel was not willing to totally abandon the God who had brought her up from Egypt; however, nor was she willing to worship and depend on Him alone. Her syncretistic worship caused her heart to become divided and disloyal to God and it was not long before He acted in righteous, loving intervention. He sent His representatives, the prophets to warn His people of His displeasure at their ways and to remind them of their obligations to His covenant. These “word-men” announced God’s displeasure, reminded the people of their spiritual obligations, called for genuine repentance, and promised divine wrath on those who failed to repent and return.

D. *God’s representatives to His wayward nation*

These men received the authority of a divine call, were given a divine message, and were sent on a divine mission. They functioned as personal emissaries from God to warn His wayward nation of coming judgment and to call them to genuine repentance while there was yet time. Several key characteristics defined a true prophet in Israel.^d

^d This list is found in VanGemerén’s *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, pp. 32-34.

First, a true prophet from Yahweh was an Israelite who shared fully in the heritage of the covenant, divine revelation, and the promises. In light of this, his prophetic message was a divine continuation of what God had revealed already to Moses.

Second, a true prophet received a distinct call from the Lord. He knew with certainty that God had called and commissioned him and his message.

Third, a true prophet was empowered by the Spirit of God to withstand the pressures of the contemporary society – he spoke the Word from God authoritatively, boldly, and often in the face of strong opposition. Often the Holy Spirit is mentioned in connection with their ministry (Ezk. 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5).

Fourth, a true prophet declared God's word as His spokesman. He did not bear his own message or burden but that of another – God.

Fifth, the authority of a true prophet lay in his call and not his talents, speaking ability, or personal credentials. He came not in his own name but in the name of another – in the name of the Lord.

Sixth, a true prophet functioned as a good shepherd of God's people. He loved them, grieved over them, and interceded on their behalf.

Seventh, a true prophet might give a sign verifying that God had in fact sent him. However, whether or not a sign was given, the veracity of his message was established by the test of fulfillment. God's people were to "test" the message by comparing it to the revelation God had given Moses.

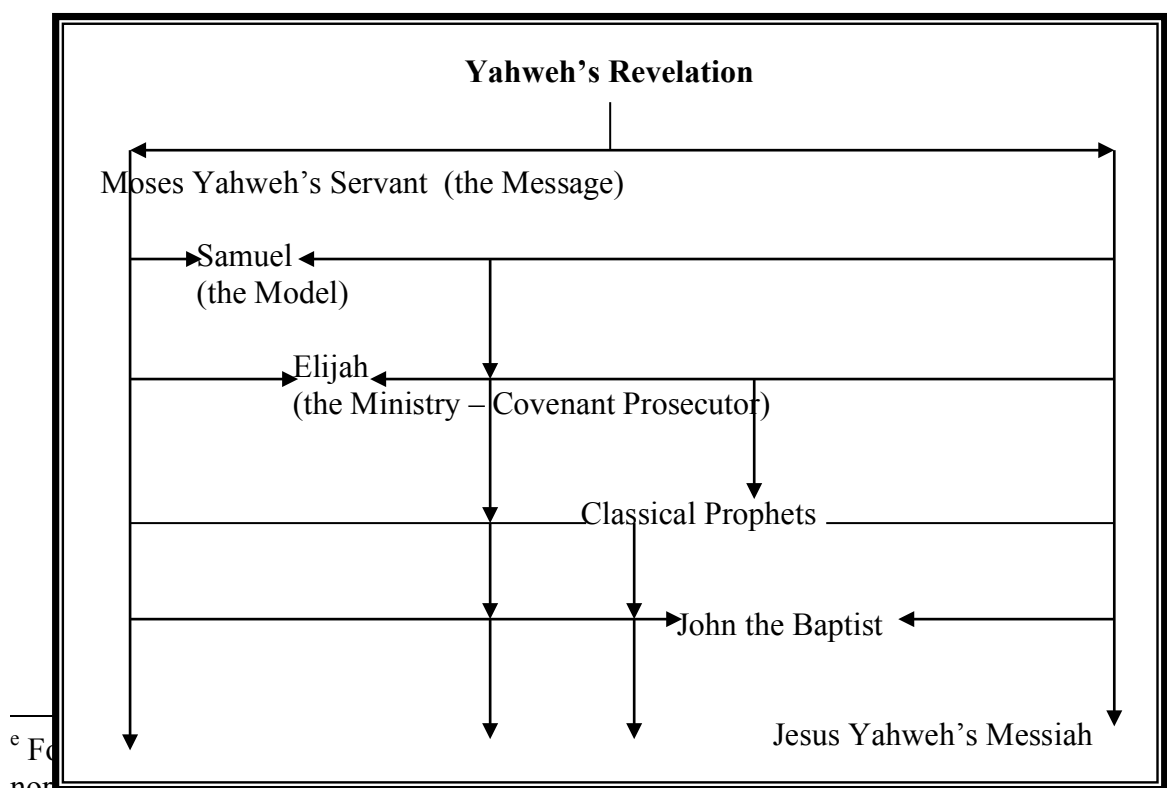
Finally, a true prophet from God would live a life that was in conformity to God's Law and God's nature. Not only could his message be tested by seeing how it conformed to Mosaic revelation; his life could be subjected to that same test.

These men stood for God in the midst of a nation that was rushing headlong in her abandonment of God and His Law. Fiercely loyal to God and deeply motivated by genuine love and concern for Israel, their message (and as a result the men themselves) was often misunderstood and at times overtly rejected. None-the-less, they were God's men for their time. They are also God's men for our time! Their message was at the same time an individual message for a specific group of people in a specific setting as well as a broader message to be added to the body of divine revelation preserved for the good of God's people in all ages.

II. Prophetic Development:

There were many prophets sent from God in Israel's history. The Old Testament primarily contains the messages of those who were known as the 'writing prophets.' Other prophets were named but receive only passing mention within a particular narrative whereas others were unnamed messengers sent to deliver God's message in a particular context. However, all genuine prophets were part of an ongoing stream of

authoritative messengers who spoke for God to His people. This stream can be traced back through biblical revelation to its source, Moses the first prophet. The Mosaic Covenant became both the foundation for as well as the primary **message** of all the prophets who were yet to come. Following Moses was Samuel who appeared at a key juncture in Israel's history. He established the prophetic **model** based on Moses' revelation. Elijah served as the third key figure in the development of the prophetic office. He established the primary emphasis of the prophetic **ministry** as that of serving as a covenant prosecutor or defender before God's people. It should be noted that at times other individuals are mentioned in the Old Testament by the term 'prophet' but their primary function seems to have been different than what is normally seen in Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and the official prophets who followed in their tradition.^e



^e For example, the 70 elders who worked with Moses are described as prophesying (Numbers 11:16-30); Saul prophesied with the prophets (1 Samuel 10:1-13) early on in his reign, and then again after attempting to kill David (1 Samuel 19:18-24). There is good reason to see these passages as references to Holy Spirit prompted praise or singing. This term is used in 1 Chronicles 25:1-3 to describe David selecting key individuals such as Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun who "should prophecy with harps, with psaltries, and with cymbals." The whole context surrounding of this passage is praise and thanksgiving to the Lord and it seems most likely that this term was used to depict Spirit-led singing of praise to God. Leon Wood makes a good case for this view in reference to the three passages in question in his classic work, *The Prophets of Israel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 53-56; 85-93.

The development of the Prophetic Movement^f

A. Moses – Fountainhead of the Old Testament Prophetic Movement

Without question, Moses is a key figure in the historical and theological development of Israel's national history. As the recipient of the Law, he became the mediator of the covenant between God and the nation (Gal. 2:19).^g One of the roles the Scripture assigns to Moses is that of prophet. In essence, he functioned as the first official prophet.^h However, God made it clear to the nation that future prophets would be distinct from Moses in that He would not speak to them face to face as He had spoken with Moses (Num. 12:3). The key difference between Moses and the prophets that followed was in the directness with which God communicated his revelation. Not until Jesus appeared would another prophet enjoy the level of intimacy with God that Moses was privileged to enjoy (Dt. 34:10-12). As the first prophet, Moses modeled four characteristics that would shape the prophetic tradition after him.

Moses – Servant of Yahweh

Rather than focusing on the idea of “doing acts of service” for others, this title highlights the authority and the special position to which God appointed Moses. Moses stood before the people as God's personal representative. Through Moses God intended to form Israel into a nation that would be distinct from all the surrounding nations. Through Moses, God intended to prepare His chosen nation both for unique

^f *Ibid.*, p. 29

^g Paul here refers to the covenant that was ordained by angels which is a reference to the Mosaic Law. Rabbinic tradition holds that angels were somehow involved in the giving of the Law to Moses. In this context, Paul views God as the originator of the covenant and Israel as the recipient. Moses functions in this equation as the mediator between God and Israel.

^h While it is true that Abraham is referred to as a prophet (Gen. 20:7) it should be observed that this description is given by Pharaoh and *reported* by the author of Genesis. Furthermore, nowhere else in Scripture is this term used of Abraham. While it is true that Abraham did speak face to face with God and was the recipient of special revelation, this could be said of various patriarchs. It seems best to see the prophetic office as established by God under the Mosaic administration. In relationship to Israel, the official prophetic office would end with the coming of the great Moses-like prophet, Messiah (Dt. 18:15).

service to Him and blessing from Him. The primary vehicle by which God intended for Moses to accomplish this task was the Word that He revealed to Moses. If the people would heed and give loyal allegiance to this Word, they would be blessed. Failure to do so would result in cursing. Their entire success and future as a nation rested on their relationship to God through His Word. All the prophets that followed Moses functioned as God's servants charged with the responsibility of calling God's people back to God's Word.

Moses – Mediator of the Covenant

As the mediator of God's covenant with Israel, Moses understood that the success of the nation was intrinsically tied to their obedience to the demands contained in that covenant. Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic Covenant was conditional. God had graciously chosen Israel and had established an unconditional eternal relationship with them as a nation. However, God had also given them express instructions as to how they were to live within this gracious and unconditional relationship. While the relationship itself was unconditional, God did establish conditions for His people to meet in order to receive divine blessing. Failure to meet these conditions would result in His righteous judgment. Sadly, Israel was more prone to disobey than to obey. The majority of the prophets that preached to Israel warned of God's approaching judgment on account of disobedience to the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant.

Moses – Announcer of the coming of The Prophet

At the end of his ministry, Moses announced the coming of future prophets from God and established the criteria by which the nation could recognize a true prophet from God.

In addition, Moses also announced the coming of a unique prophet – one marked by the following distinctions. First, this coming prophet would be like Moses in his authority. He would speak to God openly and would speak for God authoritatively. Furthermore, the people would hearken to him. There is some forewarning here that overwhelmingly Israel would not listen to her prophets. However, one day God would send "The Prophet" and they would hearken unto him. This is clearly a reference to the coming of messiah. Finally, Moses announced the coming of an eschatological future where Israel would enter into her rest and enjoy the fullness of God's blessing (Dt. 32) which would even extend to the Gentile nations. Many of the OT prophets based the hope portions of their preaching on the eschatological hope proclaimed here by Moses.

Moses – Fountainhead of all the Old Testament Prophets

Moses not only served as the mediator of the covenant, he also functioned as an intercessor on behalf of the people. He prayed for the nation and served as their advocate before the Lord. Many of the prophets would follow his example. After declaring the fiery message from God, they would often come to God to intercede for the rebellious nation. As was Moses, the prophets after him were uniquely called of

God and endowed with divine power for the accomplishing of the ministry God had set before them. Like Moses, they often found themselves standing alone as God's lone voice in the midst of a rebellious and murmuring nation. While never enjoying the same level of intimacy with God as Moses, these men who were Yahweh's prophets enjoyed a special relationship with Him that resulted in both unusual pressures as well as blessings. They followed in the path of Moses and were contributors, clarifiers, defenders, and guarantors of the growing stream of written revelation that God originated with His servant, Moses.

B. Samuel – Prophetic Role Model

The first official prophet in Hebrew prophetic tradition after Moses was Samuel (Acts 3:24). Several generations had come and gone since the days of Moses and Joshua. For over 300 years, God's people had been led by judges who functioned as divine deliverers sent by God to rescue His disobedient children from the captivity which He had brought upon them for their disobedience to His Law. Seven different cycles of disobedience, misery, repentance, and deliverance are recorded in the book of Judges. During this time, the priesthood served as the primary reference point connecting the people to God's revelation. However, during the final years of the judges, the priesthood had become profoundly corrupt and there was no revelation from God in the land. It is at this time and in this context that God began to fulfill the earlier promise He made to Israel through Moses to raise up prophets from among them. The first official fulfillment of this promise came in the form of a young boy who learned to listen for God's voice when all those around him were spiritually deaf. Samuel became renowned as a powerful voice for God to call the nation out of the spiritual morass that resulted from every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. Samuel functioned as a bridge between the period of the judges and the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. He warned the people against establishing the monarchy for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way and in the end, he found and anointed the king of God's own choosing.

It is here that the Old Testament account picks up afresh and begins the initial development of the prophetic tradition in Israel. Samuel, as the first of many prophets, established the prophetic model in three specific aspects.

Samuel – Called Servant of Yahweh

Samuel functioned as the last judge of Israel before the establishment of the monarchy (1 Sam. 7:15-17; Acts 13:20). In addition, he functioned as a true priest among God's people offering sacrifices on their behalf, interceding for the nation, and anointing both Saul and David to the kingship. However, it was in his official role as a prophet that all of Israel came to know and experience Samuel's ministry (1 Sam. 3:20). Samuel did not take this office upon himself; he was chosen and appointed by God to this task (1 Sam 3:1-21) and through this chosen prophet, God chose to again reveal Himself by the giving of divine revelation (1 Sam. 3:21).

Samuel – Recipient and Voice of Divine Revelation

The specific calling of God's prophetic servant was intrinsically tied to the receiving and declaring (verbally and/or in written form) revelation from God. In this, Samuel and all subsequent prophets stood firmly in the Mosaic example. It was not their message – it was the “Word of the Lord” that came to them. Samuel and those who followed him in the prophetic office were uniquely set apart by God to the task of adding new revelation from God that complemented and developed the initial revelation He had given through Moses. Samuel would be the mouthpiece by which God would speak to His people individually (1 Sam. 9:6 –19) as well as nationally (1 Sam. 7:3) and as such would function as a model for the individual and national ministries that future prophets would have in Israel.

Samuel – Guardian of Theocratic Interests under the Monarchy

Although Samuel did minister to the needs of Israel by interceding for them, judging over them, and providing spiritual guidance when necessary, his primary role as a prophet was to protect and advance God's interests among His people. This is seen most graphically in three pivotal roles Samuel undertook in Israel. As a judge, his primary concern was not the convenience or advancement of national interest but rather that the nation would walk in ways that pleased the Lord. To this end he preached and prayed ceaselessly. The second major role came at the end of his judgeship when he stood against the collective will of the people who wished to establish a monarchy in order to be like the surrounding nations. Samuel understood that God's design was for Israel to be distinct from the surrounding nations and so at great personal sacrifice he stood alone in challenging the popular idea of a monarchy. Only when God directly intervened with specific instruction did Samuel consent. His final role was to stand as a spokesman for God as guardian for divine interests in his dealings with the rebellion of Saul. Samuel was not at all reserved in his comments against Saul's decisions when they ran contrary to God's revealed instruction. In fact, on more than one occasion, Samuel stood before Saul and sternly rebuked him before the people. In all of this Samuel revealed his primary loyalty as being to God and His interests rather than those of the king or the nation. Many a prophet after him would find himself facing the lonely and uncomfortable task of rebuking one of Israel's rebellious monarchs. Samuel established clearly that the prophet of God held the interests of God in sacred trust. The carrying out of the responsibilities of that trust was paramount regardless of the personal implications to the individual occupying the prophetic office. More often than not, their message was an announcement of divine displeasure and ensuing consequences upon a rebellious monarch or nation. No matter what initial reception was given the message (or the messenger), God always had the final say. His Word through the prophet would come to pass – for good or for evil, for blessing or for judgment.

C. *Elijah – Prophetic Ministry as Covenant Prosecutor*

The prophetic office came of age during the ministry of Elijah. Although no inspired book bears his name or is comprised solely with his prophecies, perhaps no other classical prophet exerted more influence on the prophetic tradition than Elijah. Elijah burst on the scene during a time of great spiritual crisis for Jacob's house. The golden

years of the monarchy had faded and the once glorious kingdom had been divided into two competing nations, Israel and Judah. Ahab, scion of the Omri dynasty, brought great military, political, and economic advances to the Northern kingdom, Israel. Under his capable administration, Israel became a “power player” on the international scene of the day. However, Ahab had accomplished these gains at a great spiritual price. Rather than waiting on the Lord and resting in His might, Ahab turned to the power politics (*realpolitik*) of the surrounding pagan nations. He added the popular cult of Baal into the religious life of Israel and his administration underwrote the costs of supporting more than 850 priests and prophets associated with this pagan religion. The nation as a whole followed suit and bowed down to Baal and his consort, Asteroth on almost every high hill in the land.

In response to this act of treachery on the part of the people against His covenant, God sent His divine representative, Elijah, to bring suit against the nation. Elijah stood before Ahab and accused him of being the real “troubler” of Israel on account of his leadership in the national breach of God’s covenant. The suit came to a climax on Mt. Carmel where an official contest was held between God (represented by His prophet) and Baal (represented by 850 priests and prophets). The victory was decisively in God’s favor and the nation was given notice – they must choose. No longer would God ignore such acts of treachery. Sadly, Ahab who led the nation into paganism failed to lead them back to Yahweh, the ultimate authority behind his throne. God’s gracious invitation was rejected and the treachery of Israel would eventually end in devastating judgment from God. From this point on, the prophetic message to Israel introduced the warning of coming judgment as a primary theme.

Discouraged, Elijah journeyed to Sinai where he formally accused Israel of three devastating charges. First, they had rejected God’s covenant. Second, they had broken down and abandoned God’s altars. Third, they had rejected and killed God’s appointed messengers, the prophets. God responded to these charges with a three-fold message of judgment and a promise of hope. God declared that He would send three instruments of judgment on Israel: 1) internal political forces (Jehu) would remove the house of Omri and a new dynasty would be established that would greatly trouble Israel; 2) external military forces would devastate Israel as the armies of Hazael the Aramean came up against Israel; 3) Elisha the prophet would succeed Elijah and continue to trouble the nation with messages of divine wrath to come. Ultimately, all of this would end with the fall of Jehu’s dynasty and the destruction of the nation by Assyria in 722 B.C.

Whereas Samuel and the prophets after him primarily functioned as advisors and preachers to the king, Elijah took his message out of the palace and made his case before the entire nation. God not only indicted the king for failed leadership; He initiated a lawsuit against the people as a whole on account of their breach of covenant. From then on, the prophets would no longer merely warn and entreat, they would pronounce God’s judgment and proclaim the coming wrath prescribed in the covenantal curses set forth by Moses.

However, all was not lost. God also reminded Elijah that He had preserved a righteous remnant in the land. This remnant would be the eschatological hope for Israel. Interestingly, most of the prophets who followed after Elijah proclaimed God's wrath against both branches of Jacob's house but they also generally included a message of hope to the faithful remnant. This remnant theology became a key theme in understanding the eschatology of the minor prophets. This remnant would ultimately inherit all of the eternal and unconditional promises made by God to His chosen people.

Elijah, rooted in the message of the Mosaic Covenant and following the model set by Samuel, added a new dimension to the prophetic tradition. He functioned as the national conscience accusing the nation of covenantal breach and warning of the approaching albeit yet distant judgment. Sadly, the nation ignored his preaching and that of the subsequent prophets and the judgment that was distant in Elijah's day came to pass with irreversible finality. The case was closed, the verdict rendered, and the sentence was executed by God through the hand of the Assyrian army in 722 B.C.

III. Prophetic Tradition:

The development of the prophetic tradition in the history of Israel is closely tied to the monarchy. From the time of Samuel all the way up through the exile, God sent prophets to represent Him to the kings who would reign over his people. Even during the captivity and after the return from exile, the prophets assured the nation of the future of David's throne. In studying the messages of these prophets, it is clear that they shared a common heritage and were tied to the same divine revelation – the Mosaic covenant. It is also clear that each writing prophet added progressively to the body of this revelation increasing both the blessing and the accompanying responsibility of divine revelation.

A. Court Prophets

After Samuel's ministry in the days of both Saul and David, there were a group of prophets called by God to serve as divine counselors and spiritual advisors to the king. Because their primary loyalty was to God and His covenant, at times these men found themselves in a confrontational role rather than an advisory one. Their primary responsibility was to stand in the way of the king so that he did not stray from the Covenant of God either in his personal practice or in the politics he acted upon for the nation. Often these men gave advice, rebuked, or declared God's specific message to the king. At times, they kept a divine record of the deeds of the king. Nathan, Gad, and Heman were all court prophets during David's reign. Nathan was also involved in the very early years of Solomon's reign. Jereboam I received divine messages from Ahijah as well as an unnamed prophet (1 Kings 11 – 14). Rehoboam was served by Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:22-24). Throughout her history, the divided house of Jacob was served by a series of dedicated prophets who often spoke messages to one or both of the kingdoms.

Initially, these prophets directed their ministry primarily to the monarch and may have even on occasion been considered members of the royal court. All of this would drastically change after the division of the kingdom. As the message of the prophets became increasingly more pointed due to the apostasy of both the king and the people, the prophets soon found they were no longer welcome in the royal court. This was particularly noticeable early on in the history of the Northern kingdom, Israel.

B. *Prophets in Israel*

Nine different dynasties of kings would rule over the Northern kingdom during her 200 year existence as a nation separate from Judah. Apostasy appeared early on in the initial days of Israel. Jeroboam I, fearful that his people would defect to Judah in order to worship Yahweh at the temple in Jerusalem, erected two shrines at each end of his kingdom (Dan and Bethel) where the Northern tribes would worship. In essence, Israel had a counterfeit, competitive religion with her own priesthood, sacrifices, and altars of worship. While they worshipped Jehovah, it was counterfeit worship and He was honored in name only. God graciously sent prophets to confront and warn both the king and the nation of the dire consequences of their apostate ways. From the beginning, God sent an unnamed prophet who predicted the birth of a future king of Israel, Josiah, who would burn the bones of the priests who were serving at the new shrines on the very altars where they were ministering. However through this prophet, God also indicated His gracious readiness to forgive and receive Israel conditioned on her repentance. When Jeroboam's arm was withered for opposing God's prophet, he begged the prophet to entreat God on his behalf and received divine healing from God as a result of that prophet's intercession. None-the-less, God's rejection of the counter-religion is seen in the prophet's refusal to accept a reward or even physical refreshment from Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-10). In fact, because he turned aside and remained at Bethel in direct disobedience to God, he was slain by God (1 Kings 13:11-34).

Elijah would serve the dynasty of Omri and would confront the "*realpolitik*" adopted by Omri and perfected by his son, Ahab. By now the counter-religion of Jeroboam had degenerated into open idolatry and the worship of pagan deities. Like Samuel confronting Saul, Elijah would rebuke Ahab and ultimately the entire nation for following after cult of Baal. Israel still acknowledged Yahweh as her God but this was an empty profession for she was obstinately opposed to obeying the first and foremost commandment of the God she claimed to serve, namely, "thou shalt have no other gods before me!"

Elisha entered the picture as God's messenger to a new dynasty – Jehu's. Initially, Jehu rid Israel of the worship of Baal but the reform was external and temporary at best. Jeroboam II followed Jehu and brought Israel to the apex of her power as a nation. He was successful on every front except spiritually. Jeroboam II stood as testimony to what accommodation, syncretism, and '*realpolitik*' could accomplish without true reliance on God. Initially, the results were promising. However, they

were built by treacherous acts and express violations of God's Covenant. God would not remain silent for long. Into this setting came two powerful preachers to declare messages of coming judgment and divine love. Amos warned the nation that God was about to destroy Samaria after she had repeatedly violated His covenant and ignored His warnings and gentle chastisements. Now they were about to be destroyed. Hosea assured Israel of God's gracious love for her and His readiness to forgive and restore them if they would truly repent. However, these messages fell on deaf ears. In fact Isaiah and Micah, prophets from Judah, would witness the final destruction of Samaria and use this as a graphic and powerful warning to urge Judah to repent of her sins lest she likewise perish!

C. Prophets in Judah

The prophetic ministry encountered slightly different circumstances in the Southern kingdom of Judah. While almost uniformly the kings of the Northern kingdom were wicked and rejected the prophets; the history of the monarchy in the Southern kingdom was speckled with good kings who did receive and honor the prophets God sent them. Additionally, although opposed and rejected by evil monarchs, the prophets in Judah stood on a rich heritage tied to their long association to the temple and the priesthood. However, this proved to be an obstacle as well as a blessing. In the Southern kingdom, a group of false prophets arose who assured the people that the very presence of Yahweh's temple in His chosen city rendered them virtually invulnerable. Surely Yahweh would honor His unconditional promises and would never allow Jerusalem to fall or His temple to be destroyed. They argued that God was going to bring them peace and not judgment and they supported this conclusion with a warped theology of Zion.

Like her rebellious sister Israel, Judah also had aligned herself with the economic, political, social, and military structures of the surrounding pagan nations. Unwilling to trust entirely on Yahweh and His Word for their wisdom, Judah looked to Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and a host of other nations for help in advancing and prospering themselves.

In addition to the court prophets mentioned earlier, Isaiah and Micah began to warn Judah that unless she turned from her wicked ways, she would suffer the same fate that befell Israel in 722 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians. During the reign of Manasseh, Judah sunk to even more extreme pagan atrocities than had surfaced in Israel. Zephaniah and Jeremiah rejoiced to see a brief reprieve under the reforms of godly Josiah but the reforms were aborted shortly after his death in 609 B.C. Habakkuk was given specific revelation related to the coming judgment upon Jerusalem at the hands of the Chaldeans. Jeremiah and Ezekiel ministered God's grace and warning to Judah even as the Babylonian armies laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. God's warnings had been rejected for the last time – judgment finally fell in 586 B.C. Jerusalem lay in ashes and the once glorious temple of Solomon was little more than rubble. The smoke from the burned out ruins of Jerusalem gave powerful testimony of God's righteous anger upon a nation that had spurned His love, violated His gracious covenant, rebelled in ingratitude for all of His works, rejected

His prophets, refused to heed repeated warnings or respond to His gracious invitations to repent, and instead adamantly insisted on adopting the wicked ways of the surrounding nations while resting in the security of His promises contained in the very covenant they had so treacherously betrayed. God was not mocked and this deceived nation did reap a devastating harvest of divine wrath.

D. Prophets in Exile

However, in the midst of wrath, God remembered mercy. He did not abandon Judah altogether. He sent prophets with them into captivity to remind them of His love and future plans for them as a nation. Unlike faithless Judah, God would be faithful and fulfill His covenantal promises to His people. Ezekiel and Jeremiah accompanied Judah to Babylon. From his office in Babylon, Daniel would prophecy a glorious future for a restored Israel that would remain long after Babylon was a forgotten memory.

E. Post-Exilic Prophets

As the allotted time of exile drew to a close, God began to begin the initial process of restoring the immediate fortunes of Judah. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, several groups of Jews would return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and repair their beloved city. Along the way, God would send prophets with a timely message to exhort, encourage, and at times rebuke the people as they struggled to accomplish the difficult task. Haggai came and re-inspired the people to return to the task of building the temple. Zechariah assured the disheartened nation that this smaller temple would witness a greater glory than Solomon's temple ever saw. Joel and Malachi both stressed the future vindication of God upon the nations who had abused Judah. They also stressed the restoration of Israel's fortunes in the future and strongly exhorted Israel to resist going back to the mere external worship of Yahweh apart from the true heart submission that marks all genuine worship of God

Prophets in Israel and Judah <i>(From the Division of the Kingdom up to the Exile)</i>			
<i>Prophet</i>	<i>King of Israel</i>	<i>King of Judah</i>	<i>Text</i>
Iddo		Rehoboam Ahijah	2 Chron. 9:29
Ahijah	Jeroboam I		1 Kgs. 11:26-40; 1 Kgs. 14:1-18
Shemaiah		Rehoboam	1 Kgs. 12:22-24
Unnamed Prophet from Judah	Jeroboam I		1 Kgs. 13:1-34
Hanani		Asa	2 Chron. 16:7
Jehu, son of Hanani	Baasha		1 Kgs. 16:1-14
Elijah	Ahab Ahaziah		1 Kgs. 17 – 2 Kgs. 2:12
Anonymous Prophet	Ahab		1 Kgs. 20:13-43
Micaiah	Ahab		1 Kgs. 22:1-36
Elisha	Jehoram Jehu, Jehoahaz Jehoash		1 Kgs. 19:19-21; 2 Kgs. 2 – 10; 2 Kgs. 13:14-21
Anonymous Prophet	Jehu		2 Kgs. 9:4
Jehaziel		Jehoshaphat	2 Chron. 20:14-17
Eliezer		Jehoshaphat	2 Chron. 20:37
Zechariah		Joash	2 Chron. 24:20
Jonah	Jeroboam II		2 Kgs. 14:25-27
Amos	Jereboam II		
Hosea	Zechariah		
Isaiah		Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz Hezekiah	2 Kgs. 18:17 – 20:21
Micah		Jotham, Ahaz	
Nahum		Amon	
Zephaniah		Josiah	
Habakkuk		Jehoahaz Jehoiakim	
Ezekiel		Manasseh - Zedekiah	
Jeremiah		Manasseh - Zedekiah	

IV. Prophetic Themes and Motifs:

The prophets as a whole preached both God's love and His judgment to a wayward and deeply rebellious people. While their individual messages contain a great deal of variety in style, both literary and homiletically, the core message consisted of the same general unified themes. This is particularly evident in the writing prophets.

First, the prophets were concerned that their hearers gain a true picture of God's nature and character. Frequently they present Him in terms that graphically portray His omnipotence and omniscience. A favorite name of God used by the prophets is His going-to-war name, "Lord of Hosts." The earth and creation is frequently depicted as responding to His awesome power and presence in contrast to Israel and Judah's obvious lack of response to His presence. He is depicted as slow to anger and full of mercy. His unwavering love for His rebellious people is another constant theme associated with His nature. However, God's love and mercy will not wait forever. His fierce and just wrath will fall upon all those who refuse His gracious invitation to repent. Finally, the prophets remind the nation that God is not distant and disconnected from their lives. He is intimately involved and deeply interested in what goes on in every area of their lives both nationally and personally.

Second, the prophets were concerned to remind the nation of her covenant obligations and expose/rebuke any breaches or acts of treachery on her part toward God's covenant. In almost every prophetic utterance, there is a call to hearken to the Law of God. God's people were consistently wandering from that Law and the prophets consistently warned them of the consequences of doing so. They also reminded the nation of the blessing that were promised for obedience.

Third, the prophets were concerned about hope. This hope is seen in the present and future kingdom God had promised to Israel. Unfortunately, they often ministered when the kingdom was at its lowest points. Israel and Judah both consistently engaged in behavior that threatened the physical existence of their respective kingdoms. Eventually, both Samaria and Jerusalem were destroyed and the nation went into exile. Tragically, the somber warnings of the prophets had come to pass. However, these same men assured the nation that all was not lost. God would not cast them aside forever! He would restore the fortunes of a reunited Israel and David's "hut" would be rebuilt into a glorious and eternal kingdom from whence God's own King, Messiah, would rule righteously over all the nations.

Fourth, the prophets consistently referred to a specific time when God would bring His wrath upon the surrounding nations (including Israel and Judah in the initial stages) and at that time restore Israel to her former glory. This time was referred to as "The Day of the Lord" and it is often seen in both an immediate context (judgment upon Israel, Judah, Nineveh, Babylon, Edom) as well as in its eschatological context (future judgment on all nations and full restoration of Israel's fortunes).

Fifth, the prophets insist that God's people live in spiritual and ethical conformity to God's covenant and that this lifestyle be reflected in every aspect of their culture and worship. They are to radically reject the politics, social structures, and religious practices of the surrounding nations. Instead they are to reflect covenant loyalty in all areas of life by living just and righteous lives, loving and exhibiting mercy, and walking before Yahweh in humble submission (Micah 6:8).

Conclusion:

The prophets, our Lord, and the apostles warned the community of faith never to assume privilege: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Heb. 12:28-29). The Spirit, however, being God, is free, and in his freedom he works through the word of revelation (tota Scriptura) and involves individuals and institutions in the progress of redemption. He may also abandon them (John 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:17; 10:1-13; Heb. 12:16-17; Rev. 2:5; 3:16) if they do not live by the Word, if they develop their own structures apart from the Spirit, or if they are secure in their own systems of belief. . . . The prophets, our Lord, and the apostles urgently set before us the way of the Spirit, of the whole counsel of God (tota Scriptura or "total interpretation"), and of involvement in the progress of revelation. There is no higher calling than to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33)! This is the way of Christian discipleship (Luke 18:17, 29-30) – the cutting edge of the razor. All who live on the razor's edge find that it cuts and keeps on cutting either to our blessing or to our condemnation (Heb. 4:12-13).ⁱ

ⁱVanGemenen's *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, p. 355.

Minor Prophets

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Fall 2012

Introductory Lecture – Part 3 *Of Prophets – True and False^j*

Introduction:

As has been presented, the prophets of Israel were holy men of God moved by the Holy Spirit to speak for God to Israel (and in a broader sense to the surrounding nations) in order to make known His purposes, plans, and evaluation of the affairs of men and nations. A true prophet was to call God's people specifically and the nations in general to live in conformity with God's revealed will for them. More specifically, a true prophet was a person

“... whose entire life-style (words and actions) was submitted to God's purposes and empowered by the Spirit and who served variously as (1) God's channel of revelatory information to the subjects of the mediatorial kingdom, (2) exhorters of obedience to mediatorial kingdom regulations, and (3) pointers to the coming Messiah whose work would merge the rulership of the mediatorial kingdom and the office of God's spokesman in that kingdom into one person.”^k

Early on in her history, God had warned Israel about the danger of following the counsel of prophets who would claim to speak in Yahweh's name but who in reality were not sent by Him. God instructed Israel to deal with these “false prophets” in the sternest of measures. *“But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.”* (Dt. 18:20) Furthermore, God told His people how they could discern and identify a false prophet. *“And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a*

^j Much of the information in this lecture comes from a few key sources on the pseudoprophets in Israel's history. Much of the foundational information can be found in Ronald E. Manahan's “A Theology of Pseudoprophets: A Study in Jeremiah”, *Grace Theological Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1980), p. 78-117. Additional information was taken from Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990, pp. 59-69, and Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, pp. 101-114.

^k Manahan, “A Theology of Pseudoprophets: A study in Jeremiah”, *Grace Theological Journal*, pp. 5-6.

prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.” (Dt. 18:21-22)

Sadly, Israel did not heed God’s warnings and as a result, false prophets rose up and flourished in her midst. In fact, as time progressed, these false prophets became more numerous and attracted a larger following in the nation than did the true prophets. Ultimately, these false prophets flourished because they gave a wicked nation a message that catered to their disobedience. Because the people were wicked at heart, they quickly followed the wicked preachers who rose up in their midst and reaped the bitter consequences of trusting lying words. This ancient danger confronts the modern church. Like Israel of old, the church has lost her will to discern between the true and false messengers from God. Unless she changes her path, the modern church will face the same consequences that came upon Israel of old for depending on false hope declared by deceitful preachers who masqueraded their error as God’s truth for life and prosperity. The question for modern believers has been articulated succinctly in the following statement:

“The question in point concerns the identity of these people. Who was the person the true prophets called false? Why was he called false, and what marks so identified him? Even more important, how could the average person discern between a prophet who was true and one who was false? What tests could be applied?”¹

The Reality and Identity of False Prophets:^m

¹ Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 102.

^m Much of the material in this section can be found in fuller form in Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 106 – 109. Leon Wood sets forth the following marks by which a true prophet could be distinguished from the pseudoprophet. 1) A true prophet did not employ divination. Jeremiah observed that the false prophets prophesied false visions and divinations (Jer. 14:14). Micah mentions the presence of religious diviners in Israel (Micah 3:7) as does Ezekiel (12:24). 2) A true prophet could be recognized by the character of his message. False prophets assuaged the tastes and practices of the people whereas true prophets preached conformity to God’s revealed will, the Torah. 3) A true prophet would demonstrate character that was in conformity to God’s word whereas a false prophet would often be marked by immoral or wicked character. 4) True prophets were willing to suffer for their message. 5) A true prophet’s message would be in harmony both with the Law of God and with the message of other true prophets. A good example of this harmonization is when Jeremiah predicted the fall of Jerusalem (a very unpopular message) and was accused of treason. A few of the elders of Israel mounted a semblance of a defense for Jeremiah by reminding the king that Micah, a former prophet during Hezekiah’s day, had preached a similar message. 7) A true prophet would ultimately be vindicated by the fulfillment of his prophecy. *Prophets of Israel*, pp. 110-112.

One of the earliest accounts in the Old Testament where a true prophet found himself at odds with false prophets is the account of Micaiah and Ahab recounted in 1 Kings 22. The story line in brief recounts the period of time at the end of Ahab's reign. Ahab, king of Israel, wanted to persuade Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to join forces with him in battle against the Aramaeans. Jehoshaphat requested that an inquiry be made of the Lord regarding the venture so Ahab called for his 400 prophets and presented the case to them asking them to inquire of the Lord. They came back with a favorable report telling Ahab what he wanted to hear, namely that if he went forth to battle, he would return victorious. Jehoshaphat for some reason was not satisfied with their report and asked a curious question. He wanted to know if there was a "true" prophet of the Lord that they could ask regarding the venture (1 Kings 22:7). Ahab sullenly identified Micaiah as such a prophet but hastened to add that he hated him because "he doth not prophesy good concerning me but evil." (1 Kings 22:8). Nevertheless, the prophet was called and in contrast to Ahab's 400 prophets, he stated, "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." (1 Kings 22:14). He went on to present a message that was the exact opposite of the message of victory proclaimed earlier by the 400 prophets. He declared that if Ahab went forth, Israel would be scattered and left shepherdless. He further accused the 400 prophets of speaking falsely due to a lying spirit that had been sent upon them by God. Obviously this embarrassed and greatly angered Ahab and in response he ordered that Micaiah be imprisoned until he and his army returned in victory. In the face of the king's wrath and facing imprisonment, the true prophet responded by stating, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me." (1 Kings 22:28) Ahab did go out against the counsel of this prophet and died a tragic death on the battlefield. From this brief account, we can learn a great deal about the reality and identity of false prophets in Israel.

First, this account reveals that false prophets existed in Israel and they were very numerous. According to the text, these prophets were apparently employed and sustained by Ahab's court and served to advise him on matters he presented to them when he wished to know whether or not he would be successful before the Lord. It is significant that there were 400 such individuals in contrast to one true prophet mentioned in the text.

Second, these prophets pandered to the desires of the king and crafted and shaped their message accordingly. They intentionally and willingly compromised the truth in order to tell the king what he wanted to hear rather than what he really needed to hear. For them, truth was secondary to pleasing the one who sustained them and made it possible for them to live in comfort. In contrast, the true prophet was willing to stand against all odds to speak the truth that God had charged him to give no matter how unpopular that truth might be or how harsh the consequences to his person or life might be. He was first and foremost God's man and loyal to Him whereas the false prophets were the "king's men." Even when instructed to shape his message to conform to the "good news" that the other prophets had given, Micaiah steadfastly insisted that he would speak only what God had declared.

Third, on this occasion the source of the message from the false prophets was a lying spirit. This indicates that at times, God permitted these men to be subject to the power and influence of evil spirits. More often, however, their message is said to have come from their own heart or mind (Is 9:14; Ezek. 13:7-9).

To summarize, true prophets received their message from God and were committed to declaring it regardless of any consequences that might follow. Furthermore, they were called, commissioned, and sent by God to speak on His behalf. False prophets on the other hand, were not sent by God nor had He commanded them to speak on His behalf (Jer. 14:14; 29:8-9). Consequently their message was generally shaped and crafted to meet the expectations and desires of the hearer. In short, although the false prophets spoke of Yahweh and in religious terms, in reality they were following their own spirit and had seen nothing from the Lord (Ezek. 13:3). Often these prophets were found in places of power and authority. Generally they functioned as court appointed spiritual advisors to the kings of Israel and Judah. Usually they surface in the biblical account when they oppose the unpopular message or warning from a true prophet of God.

The Character of False Prophets:

Not only did the false prophets preach a flawed message, they are described as being men of defective character. In fact, this should have been one of the primary ways by which these prophets should have been recognized by Israel. There have been various observations made regarding the character of these men but Ronald Manahan's five-fold description of the character of false prophets as revealed in the book of Jeremiah is among the more helpful and concise.ⁿ He observes that the false prophets in Jeremiah's day were characterized by the following:

1. Personal immorality

Several passages in Jeremiah's denunciation of these pseudoprophets attest to a fundamental lack of moral integrity on the part of these men. Jeremiah denounced these men and exposed greed and material gain as the primary motivations behind their preaching (6:13). Their greed motivated them to speak false hope to the people in the hope of gaining material wealth from their happy hearers. As a result, their counsel would not bring true spiritual healing to the people (6:14). Furthermore, these greedy and immoral men would be unable to render an accurate and true analysis of the nation's real spiritual condition. In addition to greed and material gain, these false prophets were given over to sexual immorality (23:14). Two of these prophets are specifically charged with personal sexual immorality (29:23). This portion of the book is actually a letter sent from Jerusalem by Jeremiah to the people in exile at Babylon. One of the warnings Jeremiah delivers related specifically to two false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah (29:21), who were preaching false hope to the exiled Jews. The Lord instructed Jeremiah to prophesy that these men would be

ⁿ Manahan, pp. 9 – 13.

horribly executed by the king of Babylon because “they had acted foolishly in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely.” (29:23)

2. Encouragement of evil

Not only did Jeremiah denounce these men for their immorality, he went on to castigate them for their ongoing promotion and encouragement of evil among the people. He charges these prophets with “strengthening the hands of evildoers” (23:14) and declares that from these prophets ungodliness had gone forth throughout the land (23:15). Jeremiah lamented the gross immorality and idolatry that had arisen in the land and places the blame squarely on the shoulders of these false prophets (23:9-14). Because these pseudoprophets were personally corrupt, corruption rapidly spread to those who held them in esteem.

3. Self-confidence

Even more disturbing than their immorality and promotion of evil was the arrogant confidence with which they proclaimed their words to be the “word of Yahweh” (23:31). In denouncing and condemning these prophets, the Lord reminded His people that these prophets loved to “run and proclaim” their message at every opportunity (23:21). They seized every opportunity to proclaim their “dreams” that they dreamed to the people as an authoritative word from God (23:25). At times, in their confidence they even utilized elaborate props to aid in making their message credible. God declared that He never sent these prophets, yet they ran; He never revealed a message or oracle to them, yet they spoke. God declared His opposition to these men and describes their confident words as “reckless boasting” (23:32) that would be of absolutely no profit to the hearer.

4. Compatibility with the general populace

Jeremiah’s description of the Lord’s charge against the prophets makes it clear that the prophets were dreaming dreams and declaring visions that they knew the people wanted to hear (5:20-31). Because the nation was convinced that the presence of the temple in Jerusalem would safeguard them from God’s judgment, the prophets quickly preached this message to the people (Jer 7:1-11). Not only did they preach what the people wanted to hear; tragically, they declared words designed to please the king (I Kings 22). As a result of these “lying words,” God declared a sentence of irrevocable judgment against those who trusted in them.

5. Ineffectiveness

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of these false prophets was the ineffectiveness of their proclamations. Their confident proclamations of peace, prosperity, and safety were nothing more than empty boasts, and those who trusted in them did so to their ultimate personal, physical, and spiritual peril (5:31).

“The message of the pseudoprophets glossed over the real issue, that of obedience to covenant stipulations (23:13-22 and 7:3ff). Because they did, these words, when trusted in, resulted in the actual forfeiture of Jerusalem’s security. These prophets ‘counseled a course of action diametrically opposed to that which would have been necessary to avoid the coming destruction of the city, temple, and land.’”^o

The Message and Theology of False Prophets:

The message proclaimed by the false prophets was grounded in flawed understanding of and partial proclamation of the law and Covenant of God. While their message was presented as truth; it was in fact error mixed with truth that in the end proved to be the deadliest form of error. Unfortunately, in most cases, their false message couched in covenantal language was believed over and against the true message of the prophets who were indeed sent by God.

As has already been seen above, the message of the false prophet did not originate from God. In fact, in several passages, the Lord makes it clear that He had not spoken to these lying prophets nor had He sent them to speak on His behalf (23:18, 31; 29:31). Instead these prophets had fabricated their message from their own dreams and imaginations (23:25). Some may have employed some of the pagan methods (such as divination) in order to get their message. Finally, as mentioned in the 1 Kings 22 passage, the Lord may have allowed these prophets at times to be influenced by demonic spirits.

The common proclamation of the false prophets was that the people did not have to fear but rather could expect peace, prosperity, and security (Jer 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:17). The theological ground advanced by these men to support their message related to the promise made by God that Israel would be His everlasting people. A second theological tenant of their message was God’s promise that David would never lack a descendant to sit upon his throne.

“In the face of breach of the Mosaic Covenant they proclaimed the general welfare of the people, thus promoting the notion of security. They seemingly understood that covenant breach had little to do with welfare or the lack of it. Jer 23:17 presents this very picture. Those who despised Yahweh and walked in obstinate rebellion against him were told by the pseudoprophets, “You will have peace . . . Calamity will not come upon you.” On this issue of a non-calamitous future these prophets laid particular stress: “You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place” (14:13). . . . From these observations the theological formulation of pseudoprophets was that the welfare of the people was assured, in spite of

^o *Ibid.*, 12.

obvious covenant infractions and menacing threats (for example, drought and removal of temple vessels). ”^p

Based on this “positive” theology, these prophets assured Israel that business would go on as usual as long as they observed the outward rituals associated with Yahweh’s worship. God would never abandon His chosen nation nor would He fail to keep His promises regarding the Temple and the Davidic monarchy. However, although this approach did perceive God’s commitment to His promise, it failed to realize that God had also made promises related judgment for covenant breach. In short, these prophets preached only one side of the truth and the people loved them for so doing!

“Because it approximated correct theology, its results [message of the false prophets] were all the more devastating. The pseudoprophets spoke of Yahweh’s work and will partially, not fully. Their theological distortion was primarily in not speaking Yahweh’s demands; they spoke of only certain promises. ”^q

As the people heard the message of these prophets who often held position of influence and power^r, it was inevitable that conflict would arise whenever a true prophet of God did arrive on the scene. Willem VanGemeran suggests several criteria that may be helpful in recognizing the message and identity of a false prophet.^s

1. The false prophet wove his message from the common and accepted religious practice of the day as well as portions of God’s revelation.
2. The false prophets intentionally selected portions from God’s revelation that would comfort and please their audience and intentionally avoided any reference to the portions of Divine Revelation that warned of judgment or demanded repentance or change.

^p *Ibid.*, 12-13.

^q *Ibid.*

^r VanGemeran notes that, “The rise of false prophets was inevitable because of the expectations of popular theology (*vox populi*) that defined what the prophet could or could not say. It was also inevitable that the monarchy would develop a group of professional counselors. The false prophets gained status by promoting the interests of the monarch and by speaking to the desires of the people. Thus, when a true prophet of God spoke, his audience might misinterpret his message as being “false” when it contradicted their expectations.” *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, p. 62.

^s *Ibid.*, 63.

3. The false prophet was concerned to offer a message that provided an apparent solution for the religious, social, or political problem at hand. The message was always solution and success oriented. The true prophet on the other hand, often found himself rejected for preaching that God had already determined what He was going to do to the nation.
4. False prophets intentionally guarded and promoted the status quo in their messages. The temple, the Davidic throne, the Kingdom, Jerusalem were all ultimately safe and there was no real cause for worry or repentance since these institutions were not in danger.
5. The false prophets preached and taught a man-centered message. God existed to help and serve His nation rather than the reverse. Moses and the sacrificial system were reduced to external rituals and religious functions by which the people could manipulate God. As long as you performed the rituals and knew the phraseology of religion, one's true moral character and behavior mattered little.

The Condemnation of False Prophets:

The effect of this kind of preaching was ultimately devastating to the nation. As the people relied on these "lying words of peace," they inevitably brought upon themselves the judgment and righteous wrath of God. In following the message of "Peace without change" they lost the very peace they had hoped to preserve.

God soundly condemned these false prophets and declared emphatically that He had not spoken to them, nor had He sent them. Jeremiah denounces them in the name of Yaweh and reveals that God will expose their message as false and bring devastating ruin upon them (23; 29). The ultimate evidence of God's judgment upon them as well as the powerlessness of their proclamation came when the Babylonian armies arrived in the place of the peace of which they had assured the king and the people who heard them. The peace they had promised was as illusive and transient as the smoke that rose from the ruins of Jerusalem and the smoldering ash piles that remained of Solomon's once-glorious temple.

Conclusion:

False prophets and lying words are present in every generation including ours. The examples and consequences that befell such preachers and the nation who gladly followed their deceptive message serve as severe warnings for believers in every age.

"Present-day parallels may be seen among those who speak part of the counsel of God and who, by not speaking all of it, have not really spoken it at all. These same characteristics are found among those whose 'words' sound somehow orthodox but whose content behind those words is ominously unorthodox . . . The two-fold warning is a warning to the one who speaks and the one who hears God's revelation. The one who speaks the revelation (in any age) must speak all of it, not just a part. He is warned that the desire to

be heard and followed is not the end of speaking the revelation. The end is speaking the particulars of God's Word fully, clearly in terms of the whole (the very context in which God gave meaning to those particulars). As well, there is due warning for those who hear the revelation. The hearer must want to hear the whole of the matter, not just those parts that justify his present theological ideas and their subsequent activities . . . And he must know the revelation adequately enough to know when the whole has not been spoken. Too commonly the Church has been plagued by speakers whose perversion is to speak the revelation only in part and hearers who prefer only a part or who do not know that only a part has been spoken."^t

^t Manahan, p. 14.

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Joel
“Call on the Lord for His Day is Near!”

Introduction:

Certain days dramatically change the events that follow in the lives of those involved in that day. Sometimes those kinds of days come unannounced or unexpected. However, there are certain such days programmed into the normal unfolding of life that will inevitably come to every individual or to every family in the course of time, and when they come, they will have dramatic impact for good or for evil. Sometimes those days will produce great benefit or blessing, such as the first day of school or one’s graduation day. Sometimes those days will produce great sorrow or pain, such as the day of the death of a loved one such as a parent or spouse. Sometimes those days will have a bitter and a sweet character, such as the day of the marriage of a son or daughter.

Such was the concept in OT Israel regarding the Day of the Lord. Perhaps no other prophet deals with this topic quite to the degree and extent that Joel does. It is the central theme of his little book.

How should God’s people respond when God announces that His “Day” is at hand? Is this day a time of hope and joy? Or is it a time of danger and disaster? Is there hope for a nation when that day comes? Should they call out for mercy or look forward in joyful anticipation to that announced day?

What should God’s messengers say about that day? Should they simply remain quiet and hope for the best? If they choose to speak, what should they say to the people?

This was exactly the situation Joel faced in his day and his book will give us insight into how to handle and present the coming “Day of the Lord.”

Title:

The title is derived from the name of the prophet delivering the prophecy, Joel. His name means “The Lord is God,” and there are at least a dozen or so men in the OT who also bear that name. This Joel and his prophecies are referred to only once in the NT, in Acts 2:16-21.

Author and Date:

Author:

We know next to nothing about Joel and his background other than the name of his father, Pethuel (1:1). His numerous references to Zion (2:1, 15, 23; 3:17) and to Judah and Jerusalem (2:23; 3:1, 6, 8, 17-20) seem to make it fairly certain that he was from Judah.

Date:

Dating this book is notoriously difficult and poses one of the chronological challenges of the OT. There are basically two dates that scholars have contended for Joel. The date we will consider for this course is the Pre-Exilic date (835–796 B.C.).

Pre-Exilic Date – 835 to 796 B.C.

- a. Joel lacks any mention of the later world powers such as Assyria, Babylon, or Persia.
- b. His literary style is more like Hosea and Amos than the style of the post-exilic prophets.
- c. There are verbal parallels with other early prophets
Joel 3:16 – Amos 1:2
Joel 3:18 – Amos 9:13

If this is the case, then most likely Joel ministered to Judah during the reign of Joash (835 -796 B.C.) making him one of the earliest if not the earliest writing prophet.

Background and Setting:

Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia have made frequent military incursions into Israel (3:2). An extended drought and a massive plague of locusts has stripped bare the land and brought about severe economic crisis and devastation (1:7-20).

Joel uses this physical disaster to illustrate God's coming judgment. As the locusts were a judgment on sin and stripped the land bare, God's future judgments on Israel on the Day of the Lord would far exceed anything the locust plague had done.

If one takes the pre-exilic date, then Joash was king. He had come to the throne at 7 years of age. His grandmother, Athalia, had attempted to kill all the heirs to the throne, but he had been saved by Jehoida, the high priest at the time.

Joash, or Jehoash, reigned for 40 years, and as long as Jehoida the priest was alive, he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. However, he did not remove the high places from Israel (II kings 12:7-3).

At some point during this time, there was a grave famine in the land produced by a plague of locusts. This famine and the plague serve as the backdrop to Joel's

ministry. The locust plague serves as a broader metaphor for the Day of the Lord theme that underlies Joel's message.

In Joel's day, Israel considered the Day of the Lord as a time of unprecedented blessing from God upon them. The idea of judgment and wrath upon them being a part of that "Day" was unfathomable. Joel adjusts their thinking by observing that the devastation that had come upon them as a result of the locust plague was nothing compared to the devastation that God was going to bring upon them at the coming of "His Day."

Theological Theme:

The main theme – "The Day of the Lord." It permeates all of Joel's message making it the most sustained treatment of this topic in the OT with the possible exception of Zephaniah.

The phrase "Day of the Lord" is used by 8 OT writers in over 19 different places.

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Obad 15 | 6. Joel 3:14 | 11. Is 13:6 | 16. Ezek 13:5 |
| 2. Joel 1:15 | 7. Amos 5:18 | 12. Is 13:9 | 17. Ezek 30:3 |
| 3. Joel 2:1 | 8. Amos 5:18b | 13. Zeph 1:7 | 18. Zech 14:1 |
| 4. Joel 2:31 | 9. Amos 5:20 | 14. Zeph 1:14 | 19. Mal. 4:5 |
| 5. Joel 2:31 | 10. Is 2:12 | 15. Zeph 1:14b | |

The phrase occurs 4 times in the NT

- | | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Acts 2:20 | 2. I Thess 5:2 | 3. II Thess 2:2 | 4. II Peter 3:10 |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|

Definition and Description

The Day of the Lord is a specific time when God intervenes directly in the affairs of men, either for judgment or for blessing.

Note the following conclusions Joel presents regarding this unique "Day of the Lord."

1. It is not primarily referring to a chronological time period but rather to the nature or character of the period.
2. This period is identified as belonging to the Lord; it is His exclusive day.
3. In this day, God's character is revealed in an unusually definitive way. He is seen as mighty and powerful and holy. This revelation brings terror and fear to His enemies and rejoicing to His people.

4. There are times where the primary emphasis is on the terrible side of this term, on God's righteous wrath and the devastating power of His judgment.
 - a. Earthquakes and shaking of earth (Joel 2:1-11; 2:31; 3:16)
 - b. Violent weather (Ezek 13:5)
 - c. Clouds and deep darkness (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:7)
 - d. Cosmic upheaval (Joel 2:3, 30)
 - e. A great and terrible day of destruction from God (Joel 2:11; 1:15)
5. There are times where the primary emphasis is on the blessing and restoration of Israel when in view – the day is seen in terms of promise and hope.
 - a. There will be a pouring out of the Spirit accompanied by prophetic utterances, dreams, and visions (Joel 2:28, 29).
 - b. The coming of Elijah is seen as a part of this particular aspect of the day (Mal 4:5-6).
 - c. Physical blessing, fruitfulness, and prosperity in the land will follow the coming of this day (Joel 2:21ff.; 3:16-21)

Theological Use of Term

It is clear that the prophets had two things in mind when using this term; they used it in several distinct ways.

1. To depict the near or impending judgment of God coming upon a nation
(Is 13:6-22; Ezek.30:2-19; Joel 1:15; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18)
2. To depict the far off eschatological time of judgment and blessing
(Joel 2:30-32; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:1, 5)
3. They used it to depict judgment on Israel (Judah and Israel) as well as on other nations (Edom).
4. Six times it is described as a day of doom and four times as a day of vengeance.
5. Its final phase will be at the end of the 7 year tribulation period (Rev 19:11-21) and again at the end of the millennium (II Peter 3:10; Rev 20:7-15).

6. Sometimes the Day of the Lord came with great fanfare and warning as in the OT warnings to Israel, Judah, and Edom. Sometimes the Day of the Lord would come suddenly like a thief in the night.

Structure and Outline:

I. Lament, for the Day of the Lord is Here (1:1-2:17)

- A. Lament because of the present locust plague (1:1-20)
 1. The devastating locusts (1:1-12)
 2. Lament, call on God's name at the temple (1:13-20)
- B. Lament because of the future enemy (2:1-17)
 1. The devastating army (2:1-11)
 2. Lament, call on God's name at the temple (2:12-17)

II. God's Salvation on the Day of the Lord (2:18-3:21)

- A. Salvation from the Locust Plague (2:18-32)
 1. Material blessing restored (2:18-27)
 2. Spiritual blessings outpoured (2:28-32)
- B. Salvation from the Enemy Armies (3:1-21)
 1. Restoration of the exiled (3:1-8)
 2. Enemies judged and Zion restored (3:9-21)

Note: Joel structures his message around the devastation of the land that had been left behind by the locust plague. He goes on to compare what the Babylonian army would do in the immediate approaching day of the Lord to the devastation that the locusts had done to the land.

He then jumps ahead to the distant future eschatological day of the Lord and assures the people that in that day, what the locusts had eaten would be restored to them. It is possible that he is looking at this point to the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem under Zerrubabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. However, he looks even further beyond that initial return to the eschatological restoration of the nation when Messiah's kingdom would be established. Then their enemies would be destroyed and their nation would be permanently restored.

1. Day of Lord illustrated in the present historical crisis of the locust plague
2. Day of Lord in the immediate future depicted as an army who would destroy and pillage Jerusalem and leave it as

barren as the locusts had left the land.

3. Day of the Lord in the immediate future – God would restore the fortunes of Israel and allow her to return to the land (In this view, one must address the issue of the outpouring mentioned in 2:20ff as fulfillment of the first part of the prophecy rather than partial fulfillment of the prophecy.)
4. Day of the Lord in the eschatological future – God would destroy their enemies, restore the blessings, re-establish the Nation, and pour out His spirit afresh on His people

Purpose and Message

Purpose: 2:1

The purpose for Joel's prophecy was to "blow the trumpet" for Judah – the Day of the Lord was coming (if you take the early date) – to warn God's people.

Message: (Primarily drawn from 2-3)

The day of the Lord in Joel 2 is used by Joel as an incentive to repentance. In chapter 2, Joel reveals two things to the people about the approaching day of the Lord:

1. It is immanent – it is upon them!
 - 2:1 Blow the trumpet and sound the alarm – the day is coming and is at hand.
 - a. speaks of its certainty – it is really and truly coming
 - b. speaks of its immanence – it is rapidly approaching
2. It will be terrible when it arrives – terror and devastation of the day
 - 2:2 day of darkness and gloominess
 - 2:3 a severe day of destruction (note fire imagery that turns a land that was once beautiful like Eden into a wasteland)
 - 2:7-9 It is a systematic and thorough judgment – no one will escape the thoroughness of this army.
 - 2:11 Makes it clear that the Lord is orchestrating all this – who will be able to endure or escape? No one!
3. Using this (the immanence and the terrible nature of the Day), Joel urges the people to repent by reminding them of God's gracious invitation (2:12-17).

- a. It is an urgent and intense invitation – this must be done, and it must be done now!
- b. It must be a complete and thorough repentance rather than just an external sorrow (2:13) – rend your hearts and not just your garments.
- c. It is a repentance that is trusting on and appealing to God’s character – He is slow to anger and of great kindness (2:13b-14).
- d. It is a repentance that hopes for blessing and not wrath (2:14). This is exactly what happened at Nineveh under Jonah’s preaching.

Note: Joel is asking these people in Judah to have the same response (internally and externally) that the citizens of Nineveh had to Jonah’s preaching. Perhaps God would respond in a similar way.

- 4. Note: This appeal to repentance for the future judgment that would come by the Babylonians is built on the instructions to repent and call on the Lord on account of the Locust plague in chapter 1 (1:13-20). Just like they were to repent and mourn and seek God for relief about the locusts now, in the future, they were to do this when the Babylonians had come upon them and ravaged their land.
- 5. Joel transitions from the appeal to repentance in the hopes that God would turn from the devastation and moves into an even more distant event – the eschatological day of the Lord (2:18 ff). In this future day, God would definitely be zealous for His people and restore their fortunes and remove from them their reproach (2:18-19).
- 6. In light of this future restoration that God has promised to one day bring, Joel gives specific instructions regarding:
 - a. The Land – fear not (2:21)
 - b. The Beasts – fear not (2:22)
 - c. The People – Be glad and rejoice (2:23)

Why? Because:

- a. The Land – that had been ravaged would be restored and once again become fruitful (2:22)
- b. The Beasts – would be restored and provided for (2:22)
- c. The People – would be forgiven and enjoy the wonderful benefits from a God who was pleased with them.

7. God is seen as the active agent and immediate cause behind both the devastation (locust bugs and Babylonian army) and the deliverance/restoration – For the Lord hath done marvelous things! (2:21)
8. God's promise to restore reveals that:
 - a. The bugs/locusts were His army just as much as the Babylonians (2:25).
 - b. Their destruction was thorough – note the structure (2:25).
 Swarming locust has eaten
 Crawling locust
 Consuming locust
 Chewing locust
 - c. His restoration of His people would be just as extensive and as thorough.
9. There is coming a distant day of the Lord where I will pour out my Spirit (2:28).
 - a. The first part was fulfilled at Pentecost. However the second part (2:30ff) has not yet happened. This will happen at the end of the tribulation.
 - b. In that terrible day (tribulation), whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!
 - c. There is the promise that He will deliver Mt. Zion and Jerusalem!
10. There is a further aspect to this distant day of the Lord that will take place at the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium God will re-establish His people as a nation and will judge all the nations around them (3:1-21).

Conclusion: Bottom Line Message for Israel and for Us:

- A. Repentance is required by God.
- B. Judgment from God is approaching.
- C. Restoration by God is promised.

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Hosea
“Can Anyone Love a Prostitute?”

Introduction:

One of the enduring images/pictures that God uses to help us understand our relationship to Him, and the strength of His commitment, and the depth of His love for us is the picture of a marriage.

All of us who are married can begin to make immediate connections between our relationship with our spouse and our relationship with God. In a sense, it is natural to see God using this kind of image.

However, no matter how hard one may try, there are certain things that can occur in a marriage that make it very difficult if not impossible to maintain the love for the offending partner. One such situation is the moral unfaithfulness of one of the partners. It is especially difficult if this unfaithfulness is repeated and if the offending party is unrepentant.

Maintaining strong and healthy love commitments is hard in marriage under normal circumstances. It is unbelievably complicated, difficult, and at times humanly impossible when immorality has occurred or is occurring. At some point the offended party may ask himself/herself, “Does anyone really expect me to keep loving a prostitute?”

This ugly picture is exactly the image God used in graphic visual ways to present His situation and His deep love for His people Israel. Like an unfaithful wife, they had repeatedly and willfully gone after other lovers spiritually (idols). God had repeatedly gone after them and drawn them back into His loving embrace.

How long would this go on? Would this go on forever? Would God ever abandon His bride? Would His bride ever leave her lovers and become totally focused on Him?

Furthermore, what message could God speak to His people to get them to see this horrible image, and more importantly, exactly how could He go about delivering that message for maximum impact?

The answer is found in God’s unusual call on the life of one of His prophets from the Northern kingdom of Israel – Hosea. God’s instruction – “Hosea, I want you to marry and love a prostitute!”

Title:

The book is named after its principle character, the prophet Hosea. His name means “salvation” and is the same Hebrew name as that of Joshua in the OT (Num 13:8, 16) and Jesus in the NT (Matt 1:21). As such, he stands in a long line of individuals who were in some way or another a type of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Author and Date:

Author:

We know very little about Hosea and even less about his father, Beeri (1:1).

He was a native of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as seen in his familiarity with the topography, history, and circumstances of the North (4:15; 5:1, 13; 6:8, 9; 10:5; 12:11-12; 14:6). Furthermore, he identified the king of Israel (Northern Kingdom) as “our king” (7:5).

He was a prophet to the North – very unusual. Most prophets who ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel were from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The only other writing prophet from the Northern Kingdom is Jonah.

His writings demonstrate that he was a tender and compassionate man. His marriage to Gomer, a woman he loved, was both difficult and tragic. He is often seen as the most tender prophet in the OT. Some have called him the St. John of the OT on account of his tenderness.

Date: 755 - 710 B.C.

Hosea had a very lengthy ministry—possibly as long as 80 years.

He ministered during the reigns of Uzziah (790-739 B.C.), Jotham (750-731), Ahaz (735-715), and Hezekiah (715-686) in Judah. He ministered during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753) in Judah. It is likely that his ministry also went on during the reigns of the last six kings of Israel from Zechariah (753-752) to Hoshea (732-722).

The Historical period depicted by these kings during Hosea’s ministry in Israel can be found in II Kings 14-20 and II Chronicles 26-32.

He ministered after Amos and was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah who both prophesied in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Historical Setting of the Book

Hosea ministered to the Northern Kingdom just before their destruction by Assyria. Sin was rampant. Idolatry was the spiritual norm. The North was on the brink of destruction and God sent them one final message of warning and of love.

Theological Theme and Structure

Theological theme:

The Faithful and Patient Love of God for His Faithless and Stubborn Wife, Israel

Theological Structure:

The book is structured around an extended metaphor – the marriage of righteous Hosea and immoral, unfaithful Gomer. Through this image, God would demonstrate visually His love and patience for Israel as well as why He would ultimately judge them. Hosea's preaching would be built around these key themes.

The three key verses in the book are:

1. 3:1 Where God tells Hosea to go again and love a prostitute who is actively engaged in the act of unfaithfulness.

Hosea's love for this wicked woman is to be just like God's love for his wicked people who are committing spiritual adultery against God by their idolatry.

Whatever comes in the way of judgment, God wants Israel and the readers of this book to know He loved His wife, Israel, with an unbelievable and patient love!

When judgment would come, it is clear that it was not motivated by blind and out of control anger that seeks to destroy the party that has caused the hurt. It was the result of a long process of deep, loyal, and patient love on God's part. If anything, we are left to ask why did God wait so long?

2. 6:1 Come and let us return to the Lord . . .

This passage is a tender and passionate appeal to return to the Lord. Even though He has torn and wounded in past punishment, He will heal and bind up His people if they would but come.

Tragically, Israel continued to reject this wonderful and loving appeal and as a result suffered final destruction for their unfaithfulness in 722.

3. 4:1 “There is no knowledge of God in the Land (cf. 2:8)

At the heart of Israel’s love for idols was the idea that all of the benefits she enjoyed came from her relationship with these idols. She had no real understanding that the benefits she was so desperately trying to preserve came from the hand of God.

In her desire to preserve the productivity of the land, she turned to Baal and the fertility gods.

In her desire to preserve her wealth and riches, she turned to oppression and murder.

All of this can be summed up in this statement – Israel had no real or genuine knowledge of God. She certainly knew about God and even went to visit Him at the temples, but there was no real intimacy or relationship with God.

Outline:

- I. Adulterous Wife and a Faithful Husband (1:1-3:5)
 - A. Hosea and Gomer (1:1-11)
 - B. God and Israel (2:1-23)
 - C. Both Parties Reconciled (3:1-5)
- II. Adulterous Israel and Faithful Lord (4:1-14:9)
 - A. Adulterous Israel found guilty (4:1-6:3)
 - B. Adulterous Israel put away (6:4-10:15)
 - C. Adulterous Israel to be restored to the Lord (11:1-14:9)

Understanding Hosea’s Marriage to Gomer

The primary chapters are 1 and 3 (1 is in 3rd person viewpoint and 3 is in first person viewpoint)

3 views within the literal interpretation view:

- A. The Harlot View

This view takes for granted that Gomer was already a harlot when God gave Hosea the command to go and marry her. Furthermore, it presumes that the children were illegitimate children who came to the marriage with Gomer; Hosea was not their literal father.

Problems:

1. It goes against God's stated commands concerning marriage given elsewhere in Scripture.
2. If Gomer was a harlot already, it does not fit the analogy that God is trying to make with His relationship to Israel.

Hosea 9:10 describes Israel when God found her. She was like sweet grapes in the wilderness and the first unspoiled fruits of the fig tree. It was only later, after God found her, that she went after the false god Baal.

The implication is that Israel was pure when she began her relationship with God, and then she became perverted.

If Gomer is to truly picture Israel then the most natural understanding would be to see that she **became** a harlot after marriage.

B. The Idolatress View

This view depicts the harlotry of Gomer as spiritual adultery rather than physical immorality with other men. It is spiritual perversion rather than sexual.

In this view, God told Hosea to go and marry someone who was a spiritual idolatress.

Problem: In addition to the problem of failing to depict how God and Israel began their relationship, we have an additional moral problem in that God is telling His prophet to marry a pagan (at worst) or a completely spiritually disobedient woman (at best).

Furthermore, it does not really do justice to the idea of children of harlotry. If consistent interpretation is held, then what seems to be in view here is that God is telling Hosea to go and marry an unsaved woman and have children that she raises in idolatry.

In short, there are more problems with this view than it solves.

C. Predictive or Proleptic View

God is simply stating to Hosea that he is to go and marry Gomer, and God is describing Gomer in terms of what He knows she will become – a woman of prostitution.

In this view, Gomer was not a prostitute when she married Hosea and had her three children; she had not yet turned to prostitution.

This view is the one that best handles the difficulties and the details of the problem.

Message (Themes) of Hosea:

I. Theme of God's Love

The key to the biblical view of marriage is that it is based on selfless, electing love.

The book of Hosea has almost 20 references to the idea of love.

The messages preached by the minor prophets are based on the covenant stipulations between God and Israel as found in the books of the Pentateuch. Hosea finds its counterpart in Deuteronomy – obey God because you love God! In many ways, the minor prophets serve as covenant defenders accusing Israel of covenant violation and calling her back to repentance. In this case, Hosea is appealing to Israel by showing her the depths of her violation as seen against the backdrop of God's unbelievable love.

Direct revelation/statements of God's love for Israel

- A. 3:1 According to the love of the Lord
- B. 11:1 Then I loved him
- C. 14:1 I will love them freely

Difference between our love and God's love:

Our love is often based on the performance or loveliness of the object loved. God's love is constant no matter what the condition or the desirability of the object loved.

Dt. 7:6-8 The reason for God's love was because He loved them!
The motive for God's love for Israel was God! His nature is to love.

Hos. 2:18-23 God promises to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel that will actually be very different from the current “marriage” they are in. In that day, they will be betrothed to God forever (2:19); they will know the Lord (2:20); they will be His people, and they will call Him their God (2:23).

What made the difference? God! God will do a deep transforming work in the heart of His people. In the Valley of Achor (hope) she will willingly call God Husband and not Master! (2:14-16)

Dt. 4:40 God had given them gifts as tokens of His love for them when He had chosen them, brought them out of Egypt, and established His covenant with them. ***What were these gifts?***

1. ***His Law***
2. ***A Land***

How did God’s people respond to and treat these tokens of God’s love for them?

1. ***His Law:***

Hosea 4:6	They forgot my law
Hosea 8:1	They transgressed my covenant

2. ***The Land:*** Chapter 2 summarized how they viewed the land God had given them.

Hosea 2:1-4	God gave them provision
Hosea 2:5	They gave praise to Baal and prayed to him and other idols for further provision.

II. The Theme of Loyalty

Hesed – covenant love.	It is an action word that speaks of mutual responsibility that each member of the marriage relationship have to be loyal to each other.
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Note: God’s unconditional elective love (above) initiates a relationship with His people. This kind of love – loyal obedience – sustains it.

When this term “hesed” is used of God, He is always faithful. When this term is used of the Nation, they are always faithless or disobedient.

Note: *We show our loyalty to God by obeying His commands!*

What was the loyalty of Israel like? God uses some pictures to illustrate:

- 4:4 It is like a cloud; it is transient
- 6:7 It is like Adam; just as Adam dealt treacherously or disloyally with God in his sin, so Israel had continued the pattern.

III. The Theme of Faithfulness (11:12)

Faithfulness is dependability or fidelity between two parties. Would each party hold up and fulfill their part of the relationship?

To help Israel see how this could be done by imperfect people, God makes the following observation in 11:12:

- A. Ephraim has failed – he has encircled Me with lies. He has not held up his part of the relationship and has been unfaithful.
- B. Israel has failed – she has dealt deceitfully with me.
- C. BUT Judah still walks with God! She is still in step and faithful to the Holy One Who is faithful!

Israel – you need to observe and follow the example of your sister Judah in this area. Unfortunately Israel would reject this advice and eventually Judah would follow in the steps of her faithless sister, Israel.

IV. The Theme of Jealousy – God’s Love for Israel

Jealousy here is not sinful envy; it is a passionate and aggressive desire to preserve and protect the objects of one’s love!

Hosea reveals that God has an active and aggressive plan to bring back His straying people.

- A. He will cut them off from their present sinful path that leads her to her false lovers (2:6).
- B. He will take away the gifts of prosperity that He has given her (2:8-13).

God's goal – that she would stop calling him “my master” (baali) and start calling him “my husband” (ishi) (2:16)

V. *The Theme is Repentance and Restoration (14)*

- A. Repentance Commanded by God (14:1)
Note: the initiative in this invitation is God and not Israel

14:1 “Return” is the key theological term for repentance in OT. It simply means a reversal or change of direction.

It can be good or bad, the context determines. (i.e., 11:17- the term refers to backsliding in a negative sense. Here it refers to reversing direction in a good sense.)

- 14:2 What must characterize this repentance? a Prayer of Confession

Return to God, and when you go, take these **words** with you!

1. Words of Confession – take away all iniquity (sin)
2. Words of Consecration – receive us graciously – accept the good.
3. Words of Praise/Adoration – we will render the calves (sacrifices) of our lips.
4. Words of Dependence (14:3) – Assyria will not save us; we will not save ourselves by riding on horses or by the mighty works of our hands – like the fatherless, we will find our mercy in You.

- ### B. Revival/Renewal Promised by God (14:4-5)

God promises to respond to this kind of repentance – 3 promises:

1. Spiritual Healing – I will heal their backsliding.

Their constant turning again to idolatry is pictured here as a malignant disease that they can't heal themselves of – God promises to heal them.

2. Gracious Love – I will love them freely.
Freely – constantly or continuously.
3. Spiritual Renewal – I will be as the dew (14:5)
Simile: topic – renewal
 image – dew

Point of similarity – refreshing rejuvenation

C. Results of God's Revival (14:5b-9)

1. There is going to be abundant growth – they will flourish like the lily.
2. There is going to be spiritual stability – he will lengthen his roots like the Lebanon.
3. There will be spiritual beauty or attractiveness – olive and Lebanon.
There would be beauty of appearance – olive tree
There would be beauty of fragrance – cedar
4. There will be spiritual fruitfulness – 14:8

Minor Prophets
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Amos
“The End has Come! – A Call for Moral Obedience”

Introduction:

How does a person tell someone that he/she will die very soon? Is it better to keep silent and let the bad news come in its own time, or is there a moral/spiritual obligation to speak up? Obviously, if there is a possibility that something can be done to avoid death, then the word should be given. However, how does one break this kind of bad news to someone who thinks everything is alright? Furthermore, what are you supposed to do when that person rejects your statements and refuses to believe there is any real danger? What if he refuses and continues to act in the same destructive ways? What do you do if he turns against you, the messenger?

This was exactly the problem facing Amos. He had the very difficult job of informing the nation of Israel that they were about to be destroyed because of their sins. Unfortunately, Israel did not believe they were in any danger at all – things were going great! Politically and militarily they were enjoying prosperous times. The idea that God was going to destroy them when they were enjoying such obvious good times and apparent blessing just did not connect.

They were confident that their military might, their ritual at the temples, and their status as God’s chosen people would prevent any such judgment. Amos had the job of persuading them otherwise!

Title:

The title of the book is drawn from the name of the Prophet (1:1). Amos means “*burden bearer*” or “*burden*” and refers to the heavy message of judgment that he has been given by God to deliver to His people.

Author and Date

Amos was from the small village of Tekoa located about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He is the only prophet to provide information about his occupation or life prior to becoming a prophet. He was a tender of figs or “sycamore fruit” (7:14) as well as a shepherd or sheep-breeder (1:1; cf. II Kings 3:4). He may have been a contemporary of Jonah (II Kings 14:25), Hosea (1:1), and Isaiah (1:1).

The date of the writing is most likely during the reigns of Uzziah, King of Judah (790-739), and Jereboam II, King of Israel (793-753). He probably wrote shortly before the great earthquake of 760 B.C. mentioned in 1:1 as well in Zech 14:5.

Background and Setting

Amos was a prophet from Judah who actually preached to Israel in the North!

Politically, Israel was enjoying peace and prosperity under the rule of Jereboam II who had restored the territory of Israel (II Kings 14:25). Israel was also somewhat at peace and in harmony with Judah. Assyria had been settled, and they were feeling the effects of the incredible revival that had taken place at Ninevah under Jonah's reluctant preaching. All seemed well; however, spiritually, there was rampant corruption and moral decay through the very core of Israel (4:1; 5:10-13; II Kings 14:24).

God's judgment by the hand of the Assyrians was on the horizon, and although out of sight, it was very near (less than one generation – 30 years away).

Theological Themes:

In addition to speaking against the two primary sins of Israel Amos addresses issues related to the Day of the Lord.

1. *The absence of true worship*

Israel was worshiping, but it was mere ritual rather than heartfelt worship. Furthermore, it was counterfeit religion – competing temples and a priesthood had been set up to rival the temple and priestly system in Jerusalem.

One of the key lessons God wanted His people to learn is that He is not honored nor pleased by the mere activity of worship. He wants to be worshipped His way and on His terms. Worship was important to these people – God was not.

2. *The absence of true justice*

Their lack of true holiness and conformity to God's law in the inner heart was revealed by the appalling lack of justice in their society.

Amos's lesson to Israel was true religion that pleases God is always demonstrated in the loving treatment of others.

The essence of the OT law was summed up by Jesus as loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself. In both cases, Israel had

fallen far short of God's stated demands. Even worse, they refused to believe they had a problem – how could God be displeased? Therefore, they willfully rejected God's gracious warning and despised his messenger, Amos.

3. *The immediate Day of the Lord – a day of doom and destruction*

In 5:18-20, Amos introduced the theme of the “day of the Lord.”

Israel loved to hear preaching on this topic, for them, the Day of the Lord would be a wonderful time when God would pour out His great blessing on them as His chosen nation. When Amos started preaching on the “day of the Lord,” their initial response was, “*bring it on! We can't wait until it gets here!*”

However, Amos reveals that contrary to their expectations, “the Day of the Lord” is going to be one of doom and darkness, of wrath and judgment (5:20) rather than light and joy.

This was both shocking and offensive to his hearers. Imagine having your hope and expectation ripped away and exposed as empty and false hope!

4. *The final Day of the Lord – a day of restoration and righteousness*

At the end of his lengthy prophecy of doom and destruction, Amos did interject and end on a message of hope.

Although the immediate and approaching Day of the Lord would result in destruction and judgment, it would not be the end of Israel and her story. It would not be a final destruction.

There would also be another Day of the Lord in the distant future when God would restore and rebuild the “collapsed tent / hut of David” and restore both Israel and Judah to their former glory! All of this would be assured because of God's covenant with their ancestors. (9:7-15).

Outline:

- I. Judgments against the Nations (1:1-2:16)
- II. Introduction (1:1-2)
 - A. Against Israel's enemies (1:3-2:3)
 - B. Against Judah (2:4-5)
 - C. Against Israel (2:6-16)

II. Condemnations against Israel (3:1-6:14)

- A. Sin of Irresponsibility (3:1-15)
- B. Sin of Idolatry (4:1-13)
- C. Sin of Moral/Ethical decay (5:1-6:14)

III. Visions of Judgment and Restoration (7:1-9:15)

- A. The Lord Will Spare (7:1-6)
 - 1. Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)
 - 2. Vision of Fire (7:4-6)
- B. The Lord Will No Longer Spare (7:7-9:10)
 - 1. Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)
 - 2. Historical Interlude (7:10 - 17)
 - 3. Vision of the Fruit Basket (8:1-14)
 - 4. Vision of the Altar (9:1-10)
- C. The Lord will Restore (9:11-15)

Note passages that speak of Israel's ultimate restoration

Is. 27; 42-44; 65-66 Jer. 30 - 33 Ezek. 36; 37; 40-48

Dan. 9:20-27; 12:1-3 Hos. 2:14-23; 14:4-7 Joel 3:18-21

Amos 9:11-15 Obad. 17:21 Micah 7:14-20

Structure and Arrangement

Eight Oracles of Judgment Against the Nations

	Damascus 1:3-5	Gaza 1:6-8	Tyre 1:9-10	Edom 1:11-12	Ammon 1:13-15	Moab 2:1-3	Judah 2:4-5	Israel 2:6-16
1. Introductory Formula "Thus sayeth the Lord"	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. Yahweh's irrevocable judgment: "For 3 transgressions and for 4 I will not revoke. . ."	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. Official Indictment: "Because they/she . . ."	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4. Punishment: "So I will send fire. . . and it will consume . . ."	x	x	x	x	x*	x	x	Y
5. Concluding Formula: "Thus says the Lord"	x	x*	N	N	x	x	N	x*

Key: x = wording present in text
x* = Similar wording
Y = different wording present
N = does not occur

Interpretation and significance of Oracles:

1. Note that Amos began by preaching a very popular theme to Israel – God’s devastating judgment against her enemies.
2. Note the completeness of the judgment as indicated by the formula used for the judgment oracle “for 3 transgressions and for 4”.
3. Note the agent of the judgment – God, Yahweh (use of covenant name)

All of this would have rung in the ears of Israel as a beautiful message of God’s righteous and just judgment of these wicked nations who had been their enemies and oppressors.

4. Amos then declared a message of judgment against Judah, and he preached it to Israel. Although this would have initially been disturbing, it would not have been over shocking to the hearer. Even as they shook their heads and clucked their tongues, Israel would have felt vindicated! “See, we were indeed justified in breaking away and establishing our own religious centers” would have been their thinking.
5. Amos then drove the point home with a direct, pointed, and shocking statement: “*God is going to bring this devastating judgment on you – Israel!*” The “amen’s” quickly choked in the throats of his hearers. His message had just become highly offensive and unbelievably unacceptable and as such, it was unacceptable!

Three sermons to justify and establish the oracle of judgment against Israel

1. Sermon 1: Proof of Wickedness seen in that the powerful ones in Israel abused the poor instead of defending the poor (3:1-4:3)

He painted a picture of their wealth and power and then demonstrated how horribly they treat the poor while claiming to be good worshipers of God at their temples and altars.

Since this is deeply entrenched in them, God is going to send an army to destroy their fortresses (3:11-12), altars (3:14), and wealth (4:3-4).

2. Sermon 2: Proof of Wickedness seen in Israel’s unwillingness to return to God (4:3,12)

Amos pointed out that they were very religious and active in their “worship” (4:4-5), but it was empty and vain!

Furthermore, God had sent them signals of His displeasure in an effort to warn them and to give them an opportunity to repent. He had chastened them again and again by sending famine, drought, and plagues. Although they were willing to sing about God, they were not willing to turn to God in repentance, and therefore, they were going to have to meet God in His judgment (4:12-13).

3. In an interlude before his 3rd and final sermon, Amos lamented and mourned a death lament for Israel to show the nation how serious their condition really was (5:1-17). They were doomed to death. The only survivors would be those who would seek God and practice righteousness before it was too late – only these would be spared when God destroyed the nation.

4. Sermon 3: Woe and Warning against believing false hopes and trusting in false security (5:18-6:14)

Because they were God’s chosen people, had been promised the “day of the Lord in blessing”, had great wealth, and a strong military – many felt that Amos was wrong. They trusted in false hopes (5:18-27) and rested in false security (6:1-14).

Amos preached that God’s blessings were reserved only for those who feared God’s Words (3:7-8), returned to him with all their heart (4:6-11), worshiped Him correctly (4:4-5; 5:4-6), acted justly and righteously (5:14-15), and rejected pride and self-sufficiency (6:6-14).

Five Visions Related to Israel’s Future

In order to help Israel see what God was going to do to her as a nation, Amos presents a series of five visions which he received from the Lord. These visions would show God’s merciful character had extended ample opportunity for Israel to repent. Now they would see His righteous judgment for their hardness of heart.

Analysis of Structure of the Visions

	Vision One 7:1-4	Vision Two 7:4-6
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1. Introductory Formula	Thus the Lord showed me	Thus the Lord showed me
2. Content of Vision	And behold, he was forming a locust swarm (7:1)	And behold, the Lord God was calling to contend with them by fire (7:4)
3. Intercession of Prophet	I said, Lord God, please pardon! How can Jacob stand for he is small?" (7:2)	And I said, "Lord God, please stop! How can Jacob stand for he is small?" (7:5)
4. God's Response	The Lord changed his mind (7:3)	The Lord changed his mind (7:6)

	Vision Three 7:7-9	Vision Four 8:1-3
1. Introductory Formula	Thus He showed me	Thus the Lord God showed me
2. Content of Vision	and behold, the Lord was standing . . . a plumb line in his hand (7:7)	and behold, a basket of summer fruit (8:1)
3. Dialog between God and Amos	And the Lord said to me, what do you see? And I said, “a plumb line”	And He said, what do you see? And I said, a basket of summer fruit.
4. Interpretation	Then the Lord said, I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel.	Then the Lord said, the end has come.
5. Irrevocable Judgment	I will spare them no longer (7:8)	I will spare them no longer (8:2)
6. Concluding Judgment	The high places of Isaac will be desolated (7:9)	The songs of the palace will turn to wailing (8:3)

Vision Five 9:1-4	
1. Introductory Formula	I saw the Lord (1)
2. God’s Command	Smite the capitals and break them
3. God’s Judgment	Then I will slay the rest of them (1-4)
4. Concluding Verdict	And I will set my eyes against them for evil and not for good. (4)

Observations and Interpretation of the Visions

1. There are 5 visions – two show God relenting and sparing and 3 show God’s final decision to judge.
2. The first two visions are paired together, and the 3rd and 4th visions are paired together. The 5th vision stands alone and serves as a conclusion.
3. The First Pair of Visions (1-2):

These visions picture a very powerful God (fire and locusts) who would rather show compassion instead of judgment.

4. The Second Pair of Visions (3-4)

These visions show the ultimate end of Israel and the finality of God's decision to judge the stubborn and willful sin of the people. They picture wailing at the end and not forgiveness.

5. The final vision (5) describes the destruction of the temple and emphasizes that no sinner can escape God's judgment (9:1-4).

6. God sets forth an important theological truth in Amos 9:7-10

He reminds Israel that God brought up and delivered Israel from Egypt during the Exodus. He also brought up the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir (9:7).

Just as God had extended His grace to all these nations, so He would send His wrath upon all of these nations. The fact that God had brought up Israel from Egypt in the Exodus would not spare them! Just as His grace had fallen on all sinners including Israel, so His judgment and wrath would also fall on them.

Concluding Theological Observations:

1. Amos is primarily a book of judgment – not much hope presented.
2. God is seen as the author and cause or agent of this devastating judgment.
 - a. Most common title for God in Amos is Lord (Adonai - 25x) –sovereign or master
 - b. 2nd most common title is God's war name – Lord of Hosts

The threats that God is making through Amos' message are not empty or idle. Behind these threats stand the all-powerful sovereign God of the universe Who has arranged the armies of Heaven against Israel!

3. The oracles and visions make two things clear:
 - a. God is a God of mercy (vision 1 and vision 2 show this clearly).
 - b. There is a point of no return, and Israel had crossed it; judgment was final, sure, and inescapable.
4. God's judgment does not cancel His promise – there would be a remnant. Israel would one day be restored, and God would keep His word to Abraham and David!

Amos's message of old has much to teach us today. Like Israel, we tend to see the side of God that is most advantageous to us. When we finally get around to thinking about our sin, we almost always immediately focus on God's mercy and longsuffering. When we do think about God's judgment and justice, we normally think of it in terms of falling on others. We know that God judges sin and at times even want that judgment to come – as long as it is on others and has no negative effect on our lives or circumstances.

While God has certainly made us eternally accepted in Christ, He will not tolerate our indifferent and at times confident toleration of sin in our lives or in our midst.

Furthermore, in an age where preachers speak what the people wish to hear, there is a desperate need for God-called men who are willing to pay the price demanded of all those who tell God's people the truth rather than what makes them happy.

Minor Prophets
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Obadiah
“Can Proud Oppressors Escape God’s Judgment?”

Introduction:

Imagine knowing someone or being related to someone who was constantly at odds with you and at best tolerated you. This individual took every opportunity to side with those who were against you or sought to do you harm.

Instead of coming to your aid, this “relative” would at times actively side with your enemies and then come in after them to take over the possessions that you had been stripped of in the fight. This relative would rejoice at the evil that befell you.

When you are at the receiving end of this kind of abusive behavior, often you long for a third party to come along and put this abusive person in his/her place. You desire to see the oppressor get his just desserts.

This is exactly what was going on in Judah as they observed and experienced the attitudes and actions of their ancient brothers, the Edomites. Constantly looking for ways to oppress Judah and take advantage of her and take her possessions, the Edomites were the proverbial bully in the family of Abraham’s descendants.

A final atrocity had been committed. Not only had the Edomites joined in with the Babylonians early on in their assault on Jerusalem (Jer. 27:3), they had stood by and watched Babylon burn the city of Jerusalem and take their brethren captive (vv 10-14). They had come in and taken possession of some of the land of Judah after this destruction.

The small and weakened remnant of Judah that survived the Babylonian attack and were allowed to remain in Judah watched as their brethren, the Edomites, began to take over what had once been theirs. Surely God was watching!

How could God be just in judging Judah for her sins but not judging Edom for her sins against Judah? Surely the same God would bring judgment against Edom wouldn’t He? Would the proud oppressor escape judgment, or would God be fair and faithful in judging Edom?

Title:

The book is named after the prophet who received the vision (1:1). Obadiah means “Servant of the Lord”. This name occurs over 20 times in the OT referring to many different individuals.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the OT and is not quoted at all in the NT.

Author and Date:

As mentioned above, over 20 different individuals in OT are mentioned whose name is Obadaiah.

Many conservatives assign a date of 586-576 B.C. shortly after the fall of Jerusalem.

Background and Setting:

Edom traces its origin to Esau, firstborn brother of Jacob. It is clear that these two brothers struggled from the moment of their conception, while they were still in the womb. This struggle continued beyond their lives and was reflected in the strained relationship between the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom.

This struggle between two nations had been predicted by God and told to their mother, Rachel, in Gen 25:23. Their descendants were perpetual enemies.

Theological Themes:

1. The Judgment by God on Edom for cursing and despising Judah.

God would judge Edom for her pride and her participation in destroying her sister nation Judah and then gloating over their demise.

Note: More than any other nation mentioned in the OT, Edom is the stated recipient of God's wrath.

Ps. 83:5-18; 137:7; Is. 11:14; 21:11-12; 34:5; 63:1-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ez. 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11-12; 9:11-12; Mal. 1:2-5.

2. The Restoration of Judah's fortunes – extending even to territory that had once been Edom's
3. The Day of the Lord is coming for Edom

God will not forget what was done. He saw, and He will punish in His way and time. Just like the "day of the Lord" came upon Jerusalem in judgment, it would also come upon Edom and the nations for their sins! God is not partial! **Structure and Outline:**

God Will Punish Proud Edom

- I. God's Judgment on Edom (1-14)

- A. Edom's Punishment announced (1-9)
 - B. Edom's Crimes articulated (9-14)
- II. God's Judgment on the Nations (15-16)
 - III. God's Restoration of Israel (17-21)

One of the structural devices utilized by Obadiah is known as poetic justice or "lex talonis"

- It is the OT concept of retaliation – "an eye for an eye."
- Poetic Justice refers to this idea – punishment fitting or shaped by the crime. You did this; as a result, this shall be done to you.

V. 15 As you have done, so it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return on your own head.

V. 16 AS you drank on my holy mountain – so shall all the nations drink you continually.

Obadiah's Message:

- A. To Edom – Judgment**
- B. To the Nations – Warning**
- C. To Judah – Comfort**

How did Obadiah use this to comfort Judah and to assure her that God would indeed punish Edom?

1. First, Obadiah assured Judah that God would do this by removing four of Edom's sources of security and pride.
 - B. God would remove Edom's security in their location high in the mountain fortresses they had built – such as Petra. (2-4). God would make these places seem insignificant and despised.
 - b) God would remove Edom's riches with greater thoroughness than a grape harvester would utilize to harvest his grape vines. Even the stingiest of grape harvests would leave behind a clump or two of grapes for the poor – nothing would remain of Edom's riches.
 - c) All of Edom's trusted allies and trade-partners would betray them as they had betrayed Judah (7).
 - d) God would remove all the cunning and wise men for which Edom had been well-known for having. When these wise men were gone, the Edom's military might and strategy would crumble (8-9), and they would end up weaker and worse off than even Judah after the

Babylonian destruction.

2. Second, Obadiah assures the downhearted Israelite's that He agrees with their assessment. Edom should not have oppressed Judah in the day of His visitation against her. Edom did a bad thing, and now He would judge them for it!

It is one thing for God to punish and judge His own nation. It is quite another for Edom to rejoice in that punishment and eagerly seek to participate in it and gain profit by it.

God had seen and would punish. Judah could rest assured and be comforted in this assurance.

3. Obadiah gives one final assurance to Judah. Edom will not escape; Judah will again possess Zion (15-21), and Edom would lose even that which she possessed.

While it looked like Edom had the upper hand at this point in time, things were not always what they seemed.

One day God, Who had destroyed Judah, would restore her fortunes, and Edom would not be around to see it!

Just as there had been a Day of the Lord in vengeance for Judah, so there was coming a Day of the Lord in vengeance for Edom.

However, while there would be a Day of the Lord in restoration for Judah, no such day would come for Edom on account of their wicked treatment of their brother nation.

Minor Prophets

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Micah

The Micah Mandate: Justice Will Reign

Introduction:

The world around us is full of injustice and oppression. Any system of government must address these issues on a social, political, economical, and moral level if it wishes to survive for long. A government which ignores or fosters injustice and oppression may for a time prosper, but eventually those citizens under its rule will rise up against the corruption of its leaders.

No matter where you are in the world, fundamentally we all believe that even though justice may be trampled or suppressed by wicked men, this will be but for a temporary time. At the end of the day, justice will prevail.

In the real world where people live and work, injustice is not uncommon. It happens daily to people in every social class and in every culture or society. Injustice is always ugly no matter where it surfaces. However, it is particularly ugly when injustice and oppression abound in a community or government that claims to worship God.

How should God's messenger respond to injustice and oppression when it abounds in his society and among his people? What message from God is he obligated to preach to the people under his care?

This was exactly the situation that confronted many of the Old Testament prophets. Called to preach God's message to His people (Israel and Judah), these Old Testament preachers/prophets were not always popular. Their specific task was to issue a mandate to the people of God to live in conformity with the commands and expectations of the God they claimed to serve.

While we don't live in the same kind of social or theological setting (we are not God's covenant people living in His promised land under His established government), we still must represent Him in a world that is full of injustice and oppression. The word that Micah and others like him preached to God's people of yesteryear has a powerful message for God's people today as we live in a world that has perversely gone astray.

Title:

The name of the book is derived from the prophet who preached and proclaimed the prophecies contained therein. Micah's name means "Who is like the Lord?" His

name functions as the primary theme for the book, and it actually forms the climax to the structure of Micah's prophecy – "Who is a God like You?" (7:18).

Author and Date:

Micah is clearly established as the author of the book (1:1). Little information is known about his life or his background. We know he came from the town of Moresheth which was a village located about 25 miles South West of Jerusalem near the Philistine city of Gath where the famous giant, Goliath, was from. While some argue that he lived in this village and only journeyed to Jerusalem to deliver his message, it is more likely that he lived in Jerusalem and was known as Micah, the one from Moresheth.

The date of the book is established by the list of the three kings that reigned during Micah's ministry, Jotham (750-732 B.C.), Ahaz (732-716 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.). We typically date the prophecy from 735 to 710 B.C.

Historical Background:

In order to understand Micah's message, it is important to understand the history that led up to his day. The "golden years" of Israel and Judah were coming to a close. Apathy socially and religiously was starting to take its toll on society.

Two very significant kings had just died, and their long and prosperous reigns had come to an end. Spiritual decay had set in, and the distance thunder of God's approaching judgment was starting to be heard.

Historical Background for the Northern Kingdom -- Israel

In the North, King Jeroboam II, the greatest king in Jehu's dynasty, had just died in 753 B.C. after having reigned for 40 years. Under his rule, the Northern kingdom had been established, the borders were expanded and strategic military strongholds had been set up. It was a time of unprecedented prosperity and security. However, Jeroboam II continued in the ways of his ancestors and allowed the competing worship system that had been set up in Dan to continue.

After Jeroboam II died, his son Zachariah (not the prophet) ruled for six months before he was murdered by a usurper named Shallum who was himself murdered one month later by another usurper, Menahem. Menahem had to pay huge amounts of tribute to Tiglath Pileasar in order to stay in power. He died in 742 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Pekahiah. He was assassinated by Pekah who was murdered by Hoshea in 732 B.C. Hoshea would be the very last king of Israel; he was ruling over Israel when Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

Micah probably prophesied of the coming judgment on Samaria during the reign of the last king of Samaria, Hoshea (1:6-7). Tragically, it was too late for the Northern Kingdom, and in 721 B.C. Micah's prophecy was fulfilled.

Historical Background of the Southern Kingdom – Judah:

In the Southern Kingdom the prosperous reign of King Uzziah had come to an end in 739 B.C. Under his rule, Judah had enjoyed a time of unprecedented prosperity not seen since the days of David! However, economic prosperity, the lack of international crisis, and the conditions of peace had lulled the people into a comfortable but dangerous spiritual condition.

Uzziah was succeeded by his son Jotham in 739 B.C. He continued the same general policies of his father, but he failed to remove the centers of idolatry from the land. Even though for a time there continued to be prosperity, there was inner corruption that had defiled the land.

Micah began to address the overwhelming evidence of evil all around him by delivering a series of stinging messages where God presents Himself as having an offence against His own people.

Micah's message was finally heeded by King Hezekiah when the Assyrian army led by King Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (II Kings 18 – 19; II Chronicles 32). Upon Hezekiah's repentance, God delivered His people and spared them from the fate that had fallen upon Israel. Unfortunately, the deliverance was only a reprieve. Judgment would ultimately fall on Judah a century and a half later in 586 B.C.

Theological Themes:

1. God's Righteous Judgment Upon His People

In every section of the book, Micah warns the people of Judah that God has determined to send His judgment upon them for their sins.

- B. It is a right judgment
- C. It is a violent judgment
- D. It was a thorough judgment
- E. It was a deserved judgment
- F. It was a resisted judgment
- G. It was an impending judgment
- H. It was an avoidable judgment

Micah culminates the case against Judah by depicting a court of law being called into session where God presents His case against Israel. In spite of all that He

has done for them (6:4-5), His people have despised and rebelled against Him. In an effort to try to gain His favor, they have offered him all the external rituals of religion but have failed to come before Him with what He requires – to live justly; to love mercy; and to walk humbly before God!

2. God's Promised Restoration Of His People

In every section, not only does Micah predict the coming judgment of God upon Judah – he also stresses the fact that God has not forgotten His promise to the nation. One day, He will restore them to blessing.

His first message of hope contains the promise of a coming shepherd who would gather the scattered nation like sheep and bring them into a safe fold.

Micah's second message of hope is a more extended prophecy where he assures the nation that in the midst of judgment, God had not forgotten that one day He would establish them as a secure mountain!

Micah's third and final message of restoration describes His people as enjoying unparalleled blessing.

3. God's Loving Forgiveness and Healing of His People

Micah's third theological emphasis centers on God's character – He is a God unlike any of the heathen gods – He pardons' iniquity and passes over transgressions! He delights in mercy! He does not retain His anger forever! (7:18-20).

Micah's question is profound – “Who is a God like this?” What other God can in the midst of judgment promise mercy and then transform the very people who merited judgment into righteous people? Who else is a God like this? No One!

Micah presents at least 5 primary images of God:

1. Powerful Warrior - (1:1-7; 4:11-13; 5:5-15)
2. Righteous Judge and Wounded Plaintiff – (6:1-8; 7:8-13)
3. Tender Shepherd (2:12-13; 5:4-5; 7:14)
4. Royal Ruler (4:7b-8; 5:2)
5. Loving Healer (4:6-7; 7:18-20)

Micah's Message

Micah's messages are designed to answer 7 primary questions of any society during any period of history. The questions as well as the answers are as important today as

they were in Micah's time. These questions form some of the primary issues that the 8th century prophets dealt with!

I. What is the Transgression of My People? (1:1-16)

Micah begins by asking a penetrating question – “What is the sin/transgression of my people” What is the transgression of Jacob? Answer: Samaria. What are the high places of Judah? Answer: Jerusalem.

God is looking at His people (both Israel and Judah) and He sees them as thoroughly sinful. The two capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem, stand in for the entire nation and are representative of the sins that permeated throughout their respective nations.

Micah answers this penetrating question and shows the seriousness and the extent of the transgression by recording three powerful responses to God's question.

A. The Response of Nature to the Appearance of God (1:2-4)

The entire course of nature is called to witness what God is about to do with His people. The Lord is going to witness against His own chosen people. He is going to do this before the entire earth and He is going to make this declaration in total righteousness – from His Holy temple (1:2)

The Lord Himself is going to appear on the scene – His people needed to remember that unlike the gods of the nations around them, their God was not a distant and disconnected God. He was vitally interested in their affairs and was intimately connected with their ways.

When God appeared on the scene – creation modeled for Israel the appropriate response – the mountains melted away and the valleys split open – Nature gave an instant and impressive response when God appeared.

On the other hand, Israel and Judah claimed to have special access to this God. Judah in particular claimed that God dwelt in their midst in His holy temple in Jerusalem. Yet, unlike creation – they did not move or respond in fear at the presence of God in their midst. Quite to the contrary, they were quite content to continue on with their wickedness in the very presence of God.

B. The Response of Samaria to the Appearance of God (1:5-7)

As Micah continues his prediction he observes that Samaria will not respond like creation. Rather than bowing in brokenness and repentance before God – God would break them in judgment. Samaria would end up in total destruction and ruin!

C. The Response of Judah to the Appearance of God (1:8-16)

Like Samaria, Judah is unresponsive. In fact, in the face of the destruction of Samaria – Judah will actually see the judgment come right up the gates of the city (Sennacherib).

Micah wails and howls and strips off his clothes – all acts of extreme grief and deep mourning of the tragic death of a loved one! He is mourning over Samaria for her wound is incurable and the same devastating judgment is about to come upon Judah and Jerusalem.

Micah goes on to list 12 towns that would be attacked by the Assyrian army as Sennacherib made his way toward Jerusalem. He would actually get within sight of the gates before God intervened.

Micah used a word play on the name of each of the towns to help Judah see and recognize her dangerous condition:

1) Baseness Seen

1:10 Tell it not in Tell-Town (Gath)

1:10 Weep not in Weeping-Town (Acco)

2) Brokenness Seen

1:10 Roll in dust at Dust-Town (Aphrah)

3) Blight Seen

1:11 Beauty shamed at Beauty-Town (Saphir)

4) Bondage Seen

1:11 No more freedom – No going out from Going-out-Town (Zaanan)

1:11 No more friends – No neighborliness at Neighbor-Town (Beth-ezel)

5) Bitterness Seen

1:12 Bitter tears at Bitter-Town (Maroth)

6) Battle Seen

1:12 Peace gone – no peace at Peace-Town (Jerusalem)

1:13 Power gone – horsepower gone from Horse-town (Lachish)

7) Betrayal Seen

1:14 Falsehood reigns at False-Town (Achzib)

8) Bankruptcy Seen

1:15 No possessions left at Possession Town (Mareshah)

1:15 No testimony left to tell in Testimony Town (Adullam)

D. Concluding Observations

Micah instructs the people to make themselves bald, something that was only done as a sign of deep mourning. They were to do this because the doom of Judah was certain if no one would repent! In fact, the judgment on the Northern Kingdom was so certain that Micah uses the prophetic perfect tense to show that this was as good as accomplished (1:16).

One final observation – Micah’s strong message of judgment was delivered with a broken heart! He mourned and was torn apart with grief over the sin of his nation and the judgment that God was going to have to send. We must speak similar words to our nation, and we must do so with a similar heart!

II. Is the Spirit of the Lord Restricted? (2:1-13)

In chapter one, Micah denounces the sins of the people against God. Here in this chapter, he denounces and exposes their sins against each other. God’s people were sinning against each other in two particularly heinous ways: they were perverting the sanctity of personal property, and they were perverting the sanctity of God’s true revelation.

A. The Evil of Coveting (2:1-5)

Micah describes the people as so committed to evil and so consumed by covetousness that they would lie awake at night dreaming up new ways to get more gain!

The outward expression of their problem was their pursuit of getting more wealth, specifically land, at any expense and regardless of the effect on others. The real problem was covetousness.

Furthermore, God had given each family a specific portion of land. Since these individuals were not content with God’s good gifts and were not willing to wait for God to give them more land in His time and in His will, they chose to commit the same sin that God judged Ahab for when he stole Naboth’s vineyard!

B. The Evil of Purchased Preaching (2:6-11)

All the while they did these evil deeds, they were confident that they were just fine in their relationship to God. After all, their prophets preached continuous messages on the love of God and the goodness of God. Furthermore, they lived in the city that housed the temple of God. Surely God would never bring judgment against His own house!

When the people encountered prophets, they would instruct them not to “prattle” or to preach messages they did not approve of. So for the right price, the prophets would preach exactly what the people wanted to hear!

Micah’s response to this was to ask this question, Can you really restrict God in this fashion? Just because you restrict His prophets (so called) by enticing them with material wealth does not mean that God’s real message has been hindered or restricted.

Prophets who preached health, wealth, and happiness were simply liars for hire! Micah asks God’s people, “Is the Spirit of God restricted? Are these really God’s doings?” (2:7) The answer is obvious, and it would become undeniably so to God’s people as they faced God’s wrath.

C. Concluding Observations (2:12-13)

However, all is not lost. There would come a day when those who were in bondage would break free! One called a “Breaker” would go before them breaking open a way of deliverance, He would be their King and their Lord! This is clearly a prophecy of Messiah; this is still future for Israel! One day this righteous Breaker will come and open up the path to freedom and restoration for His righteous remnant. This has happened on a smaller scale since Micah’s prophecy, however not on the scale or to the magnitude that is presented in this passage.

III. Is There No Word from the Lord? (3:1-12)

Micah begins the second section of his prophecy by calling for the people to “hear!” In chapter three, Micah is going to challenge the princes, the priests, and the prophets who have led God’s people astray. In each case they call out to God for answers, and there are none. The princes cry out in 3:4; the priests and prophets cry out in 3:7, and there is a collective cry in 3:11. Only Micah has the answers they claim to want, and his answers are unacceptable!

A. Answers from God for the Abuse of Position (3:1-4)

God’s answer to those who abuse their position is this: One day they themselves would find themselves alone and without help, then they will cry out to God for relief, and He will not answer! Instead of coming to help them, He will hide His face from them (3:4)

B. Answers from God for the Abuse of Proclamation (3:5-8)

The prophets who so eagerly preached popular messages for the right price would ultimately receive God’s recompense. They would receive for their preaching darkness, disgrace, and desertion of any true message from God.

All of this would be contrasted with how God would treat Micah. God would empower him to speak boldly with an uncovered mouth, and his message would

actually be from God and have the potential of bringing true healing to the people who would receive it. Micah would receive from God power, justice, might, and the Holy Spirit (3:8), all of which were missing and withheld from the false prophets.

C. Answers from God for the Abuse of Privilege (3:9-12)

Those in society who held positions of power and influence (princes, priests, and prophets) had so abused their positions for gain that God would bring devastating judgment upon them and their beloved city.

The one place they believed to be safe, the one privileged and protected place, was Jerusalem. God told Micah to declare that because of their abuse and false confidence their city would be plowed like a field. Jerusalem would be made a heap of ruins, and the mount upon which their temple was built would be made as bare as the hills in surrounding forests!

D. Concluding Observations

Is there really no answer from God as the priests and prophets proclaimed? NOT SO! God has answered – definitively and directly! He has done so through the mouth of a committed servant whose words and lips were not for hire!

IV. Will God’s King Not Come and Reign? (4:1-5:15)

Having given a second prediction of judgment, Micah now turns to a lengthy section of hope. In chapter three Micah answers the question, “Is there no Word from God?” Here he addresses the question “Is there no hope or deliverance from God?”

His answer is a resounding yes! God will deliver! Just as decisively and directly as He intervened and answered their sin in judgment, He would act on their behalf in keeping His covenant with their fathers! He would send a King to deliver and reign over them!

A. The Prominence of the Mountain of the Lord (4:1-8)

One day, Israel’s fortunes would be reversed. Now she was despised and rejected, encircled by an enemy army made up of foreigners who had come into her land to plunder and steal.

One day, her land would again be filled with foreigners, so many they would be described as a river of people, coming not to plunder but to worship!

The point of attraction would not be the treasure they could take away but rather the Torah of God!

B. The Working of the Counsel of the Lord (4:9-5:1)

As wonderful as this news might be, Israel could only see that their cause was lost. Their king would be deposed; there was no king or counselor in their midst to bring all of this about.

Micah assures them that all of this will indeed come to pass, but he also reveals that God will do it in the counsel of His own wise workings. Before this would happen, they would indeed wonder at the absence of their king. They would make the long march to Babylon, and those who remained behind would dwell in the field that had once been Jerusalem.

But from those devastating circumstances God would redeem them, deliver them, and restore them to their former glory!

C. The Birth of the Davidic King (5:2-9)

This would all take place at the coming of God's appointed Ruler. He, like David, would be born at Bethlehem. However, unlike David, His goings forth would be from all eternity.

In other words – this promised Ruler Who would bring all of this to pass would be none other than God Himself!

D. The Cleansing of the Land (5:10-15)

When He would come, He would heal the land by cleansing from it all that would keep the people from depending on God.

Generally there are four things that stand in the way of our total reliance of God! God promises here to remove those things from Israel.

1. ***Self Help*** must be removed (5:10). Horses and chariots were instruments that the people themselves would use and depend on to help themselves do their jobs and defend their possessions. God would strip this away.

2. ***Self Defense*** must be removed (5:11). All their cities and high places had to be torn down. Their only defense must be God.

3. ***Self Deception*** must be removed (5:12). Sorceries and soothsayers were simply ways that the people attempted to manipulate God. All such manipulations are empty and deceptive. God can't be manipulated or controlled by those who claim to serve Him.

4. ***Self Worship*** must be removed (5:13-14). All false gods from other nations must be removed. Rather than adding them to the worship of

Jehovah as a “just in case” option, they were to completely and totally rely on God!

E. Concluding Observations

In an age dominated by self-reliance, Micah’s message is penetratingly timely! God has not abandoned His people or His cause, rather His people have abandoned Him. They have chosen to rely on the arm of flesh and are thus doomed to the misery of failure and want. If we will but abandon ourselves to Him, then we will see the mighty arm and deliverance of God. He will not absent Himself forever; He will come, and when He does, He will come in power and in glory!

V. What Does the Lord Require From Us? (6:1-16)

The third and final section of the book begins by God calling all the universe to “hear” His case against His people. He asks four questions that present four indictments against Israel.

This section of Micah has become one of the most well-known of OT passages along with Hosea 6:6 and Amos 5:24. It stands at the heart of God’s case against His people that was presented by all the prophets!

Here are the four questions and their implicit indictments:

A. Have I Mistreated You? (6:1-3)

Literally – “How have I wearied you?” God asks His people to examine His past dealing with them and to explain to Him in the presence of the witnessing universe (which was present when God actually did the mighty works for them) how He has treated them unfairly or how He has made them tired or weary of serving Him due to His harsh treatment of them.

He appeals to them to marshal their evidence and make their case against Him – “Testify against Me!”

B. Have I Required too Much From You? (6:4-8)

Here is what I have done for you. I brought you up from Egypt; I redeemed you from bondage; I gave you spiritual leaders in Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; I protected you from the curse of a wicked prophet by forcing him to bless you; and I brought you into the land you now possess by parting the Jordan River.

The whole reason I did this is so that you would come to experientially know My righteousness! I did this to make you righteous!

Instead of coming to me with a righteous heart, in spite of all that I have done to show you righteousness, you come asking me what constitutes acceptable worship! And your answers reveal just how unrighteous you are!

I have already told you what I expect, what is good and acceptable in my sight! Here is what constitutes “good” –I want you to live out in your daily life justice, mercy, and humility!

C. Have I Approved of Your Exploiting One Another? (6:9-12)

Are you living this way? No! Do I approve of your lack of justice and mercy? No!

D. Have I Blessed Your Get-Rich-Quick Schemes? (6:13-16)

Are you walking in humility before God? No! Instead, you are consumed by your pride and desire to gain more riches and wealth. Do I approve? No! I will cause you to eat and be sick; to eat and not be satisfied. I will undo all that you do to gain wealth and status for yourself!

You have followed in the way of the Dynasty of Omri! Like his wicked son Ahab, you have oppressed others violently for your personal gain. And you will come to the same end! Ahab died a violent death, and all 70 of his children were slain by Jehu!

E. Concluding Observations

God is more interested in our heart than our works! His gracious work in our lives in the past is designed to show us His righteousness and to bring us to the place where we embrace His righteousness for our own.

All our social activity is not an acceptable substitute for true heart worship before Him.

VI. Where is the Lord Our God? (7:1-10)

These 10 verses make up a very unique section of Micah’s prophecy. They are his personal expression of grief as he delivered this difficult prophecy. These verses make up his personal lament for his nation as he faithfully and thanklessly preaches God’s message to them.

These verses expose him to be a man deeply distressed and greatly afflicted by the moral condition into which his nation had fallen.

At the heart of his cry for Judah is a simple and penetrating question – Where is the Lord your God?

As Micah looked about and searched for other righteous individuals among his fellow citizens, he found none! He cried out in despair. Where is the Lord your God?

When do people ask this question? When do righteous people start asking in desperation about the presence and power of God? This question rises in three basic circumstances.

A. When We Look for Just One Righteous Person (7:1-4)

“Woe is me!” Term here is an intense term, it describes a heart wrenching cry much like that of Isaiah!

There are no faithful men! The faithful man has vanished from the earth, and there is no one upright among them! (7:2) In fact the people are so skilled and devoted to evil deeds that they devote themselves to doing evil with “both hands!”

Even the best of them are like a briar or thorn bush tearing all who pass by! Where is God in all of this?

B. When We Look for Just One Friend (7:5-7)

Micah started by examining society as a whole. The picture grows much worse as he examines his family and circle of acquaintances looking for just one true and loyal friend!

What he discovers is horrifying; a man’s enemies are those of his own home! (7:6).

However, Micah does not fall into utter desperation. He has looked in all the places on earth; there is just one place more to look and that is to Heaven. There Micah finds the One who is a never failing and always true friend!

Since I have searched and have not found a true friend on earth, therefore, I will look to the Lord! I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me! (7:7)

C. When We Look for Just One Vindicator (7:8-10)

Micah looks at the people of God and even though they can’t see it yet, he sees that God has determined to deliver them over to Babylon. They will be prisoners of war!

No one will be there to plead their case. No one will fight for them. No one will come to vindicate her! All of the nations who see and hear will rejoice over her fall! Her enemies will rejoice at her fall!

However, Micah knows of One who will come and vindicate His people. So he instructs the nations and warns them against rejoicing and the calamity that has fallen upon Israel.

The same God who has chastised His people will one day vindicate them and restore their fortunes. At that time, woe unto all those nations who rejoiced at her calamity and took advantage of her misfortune.

D. Concluding Observations

It is a huge mistake to live and act as though God were not present or aware of our lifestyles. It is a deadly error to think God is not aware of the wickedness around us.

When all men are wicked, we are often tempted to think that God is somehow absent and that He will somehow overlook our participation in the wickedness of others!

God is not only aware, He is intimately involved! He wants us to be the one righteous person in our society. He will be our one true friend! He will vindicate us and defend our cause!

VII. Who is a Pardoning God Like Ours? (7:11-20)

This final section of Micah's prophecy is set in that distant day when God has delivered His people and restored to them their fortunes. In that future day, God's grace will be poured out upon His people and will be evident to others in the following expressions or ways:

A. In the Rebuilding of His People (7:11-13)

God will rebuild His people by restoring their walls, not the military ramparts that protected their cities but the walls that would enclose vineyards and flocks. This would be a symbol of peace and prosperity. He would also give them expanded boundaries; the decree mentioned in 7:11 is better translated boundaries. In addition to expanded territory, God would increase their population (7:12-13).

B. In the Resumption of His Mighty Deeds (7:14-17)

A second evidence of God's gracious activity on behalf of Israel will be seen in His resuming His role as their shepherd, His working miracles and mighty works on their behalf, and His conquering of enemy nations.

C. In the Remission of Our Sins (7:18-20)

This is the climax of Micah's question – and the answer to His question, “Who is a God Like You?”

The final evidence of God's grace to His people is seen in the remission of their sins!

D. Concluding Observations

Truly, there is no other god anywhere like this God! Only a God who exceeds any and every comparison and expectation can forgive and forget our sins, iniquities, and transgressions!

Truly this is a great God with no equal! No wonder Micah climaxes his book with this question – “Who is Like Our God?” Our answer must be that of Micah – there is no one or nothing that even comes close!

Therefore, serve Him alone with fear and with gladness; approach Him with a pure heart and clean hands! Live justly, love mercy, and walk in humility before Him in all of your ways and for all of your days!

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Jonah
“Should God be Compassionate on Everyone?”

Introduction:

Should God be merciful to a murderer? Is there any place for compassion on the monsters who prey on society? Why should a just God have mercy on those who have not demonstrated any love or obedience toward Him? What about mass murderers like Adolph Hitler? What about monsters of immorality like the serial killers or child abusers that prey on the weak or helpless in society? What about people who kill randomly for their own ends through acts of terrorism and violence? Is it really just that these incredible monsters of society should receive forgiveness and spiritual deliverance from God simply by asking for it?

This was the dilemma facing Jonah. God had been in the process of warning the people of Jonah’s land that they were facing His judgment for their sin. He had revealed that one day, the Assyrian armies would bring an end to Jonah’s nation and take them into captivity.

Assyria was a dominant world power that was known worldwide for cruel and unusual wickedness. It was to one of the larger and most ancient of their cities, Nineveh, that God commissioned Jonah to preach His message. At this point in Assyria’s history, they were sitting on top of the world as a superpower. Although cruel, arrogant, and proud, there was more yet to come. Her cruelest and most violent kings were still ahead in her history. A century later, another prophet would preach to Nineveh and at that time there would be only wrath and the announcement of God’s irreversible judgment on their arrogant, cruel, and godless nation. However, that is yet to come. In Jonah’s day, the cup of God’s wrath was still not full. It was not yet time for judgment; there was still time for repentance and mercy. God’s gracious message would come to them through the lips of a very reticent preacher. Jonah may be one of the only cases where God sent a revival through a preacher who wanted to see his audience reject and fall under God’s judgment!

Jonah was unwilling to go because he knew God’s nature. If Nineveh repented, then God would in fact forgive the very nation that God had said would one day destroy Jonah’s nation. Understandably, Jonah was not enthusiastic about the idea of giving Nineveh a second chance. In his mind, God should destroy them once and for all, and he wanted no part of any plan that involved mercy for these monsters!

Jonah in essence asks the question that many times is on our heart –“Is it really fair for God to have this kind of mercy on these kinds of monsters?”

Title:

Following the Hebrew MT, the title of the book is derived from the principle character in the book – Jonah, the son of Amittai (1:1). Both the LXX and the Vulgate give the book the same name. Jonah’s name means “dove.”

Author and Date:

No direct claim is made in the book regarding who wrote it. However, the evidence seems to argue that Jonah wrote it personally and used the 3rd person in telling his story.

Context in the book as well as the Kings passage seems to place Jonah during the long ministry of Jeroboam II who ruled the 10 Northern tribes of Israel from 793-758 B.C. This means that he would have been a prophet to Israel shortly before Amos came on the scene in about 760 B. C.

Background and Setting:

As a prophet to the Northern tribes, Jonah shares the same background and setting as that of Amos. He was perhaps one of the earliest of the minor prophets. His message reminds Israel that God is merciful and quick to forgive if they would but repent as did the Ninevites.

The nation was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity under the capable leadership of Jeroboam II. He was in many ways a great political and military leader who enlarged Israel’s northern borders almost to where they had been under David’s rule. However, in spite of his many positive accomplishments, Jeroboam II was a wicked king who chose to walk in spiritual disobedience to God.

Externally, the kingdom looked strong and prosperous; everything looked great! But spiritually, the nation was in deep poverty and affliction. Religion was ritualistic and idolatrous (idolatry was on the rise), and justice had become perverted in all of Israel.

Peace and prosperity had made Israel bankrupt spiritually, morally, and ethically (II Kings 14:24; Amos 4:1-ff; Amos 5:10-13). As a result, God was going to eventually punish Israel by bringing destruction and captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Theological Themes:

1. God’s sovereign rule and control over the affairs of men
 - a. The irresistible call of the prophet
 - b. The control of all elements of nature (storm, fish, gourd, worm)
 - c. God’s unchallengeable right to do as He wishes in the affairs of nations and of

- men (forgiveness and judgment are up to God)
2. God's loving mercy and willing forgiveness – God delights to show mercy upon unworthy men – He is slow to anger and quick to forgive.
 - a. God's gracious willingness to forgive repentant Nineveh
 - b. God's gracious willingness to forgive rebellious Jonah
 3. Salvation is only from the Lord
 - a. Jonah's only hope for deliverance from death in the deep was God – and God provided a fish that He had prepared
 - b. Nineveh's only hope for deliverance from God's wrath was God – and God graciously spared the city.
 - c. Israel's only hope of deliverance from God's wrath was God – would they respond? Would they repent?
 4. The spiritual hardness of man's heart contrasted with the tenderness of God's heart

It is interesting to note that a “subtle” message of this book has to do with the hardness of Man's heart. The real question that is addressed in the book is this: Who really has the hardest heart?

- a. Initially, Nineveh is going to be judged because in the hardness of their hearts they had sinned against God. Yet God was still tender toward them and determined to send them a warning.
- b. God sent them a warning through Jonah whose hard heartedness toward his enemies led him to refuse to go, and ultimately, Jonah ended up being tossed overboard to certain death in the midst of a storm. Yet God's tender heart toward Jonah causes Him to rescue and preserve Jonah alive.
- c. After preaching the message to Nineveh and seeing the incredible revival that broke out, Jonah's hard heart became embittered, and he went outside the city and prepared to die. God tenderly provided a gourd to care for His stubborn child.
- d. God also sent a worm that killed the gourd which finally aroused Jonah's indignation. What had the plant done to deserve that fate?

It is here that God teaches the key lesson of the book to Jonah and to Israel.

“Jonah, if your hard heart had compassion on a gourd that I made, then why do you have a problem with the fact that I have had compassion on a city of over one million people that I also made?”

“Israel – if hard hearted and wicked Nineveh repented nationally from the king down to the animals in the city after hearing a five-word message from a prophet that they had never met before, why are you not nationally repenting considering all the prophets that I have sent to you and all the messages they have delivered to you from me? Who really has the harder heart? Who really has the more rebellious and wicked heart?

Outline:

- I. *Running from God’s Will (1:1-17)***
 - A. The Commission of Jonah (1:1-2)
 - B. The Flight of Jonah (1:3)
 - C. The Pursuit of Jonah by God (1:4-26)
 - D. The Preservation of Jonah (1:27)
- II. *Submitting to God’s Will (2:1-10)***
 - A. The Helplessness of Jonah (2:1-3)
 - B. The Prayer of Jonah (2:4-7)
 - C. The Repentance of Jonah (2:8-9)
 - D. The Deliverance of Jonah (2:10)
- III. *Fulfilling God’s Will (3:1-10)***
 - A. The Commission Renewed (3:1-2)
 - B. The Prophet Obeys (3:3-4)
 - C. The City Repents (3:5-9)
 - D. The Lord Relents (3:10)
- IV. *Questioning God’s Will (4:1-11)***
 - A. The Prophet Displeased (4:1-5)
 - B. The Prophet Rebuked (4:6-11)

Textual Survey:

I. *Chapter 1: Jonah’s response to God’s Direction/Call*

- 1:1 Call is very clear.
- 1:2 Standard form for the call of God in a prophet’s life. This call parallels other calls in the lives of other prophets.

Jonah’s call is representative of the specific call given to prophets, and it is also typical of the general call given to all believers. We are not to respond as Jonah did in rebellion to the Lord’s stated will.

1:3 Jonah headed in the exact opposite direction from where God told him to go.

Disobedience is always going opposite from where God wants us to go.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term for repentance was the word for “turn around”.

There is no stated reason for Jonah’s disobedience – not because there wasn’t one (most people, including Jonah, have reasons behind their disobedience which they feel justify their actions). No reason is given simply because there is no good reason to disobey God!

Perhaps Jonah was motivated by carnal reasons – fear, anger, rebellion, frustration at being called away from his comfort zone.

Perhaps Jonah was motivated by “patriotic or moral” reasons – Nineveh was wicked and an enemy nation, and as such, they needed to be destroyed.

Note: It is one thing to say to Jonah, go and see if individual Ninevites will repent and come to God. It is another thing to say, go and preach so that I can spare the wicked nation and its political system.

1:4-16: Punishment comes to Jonah for disobedience

Note: Jonah wanted God to proceed with His punishment of Nineveh for disobedience. Here God punishes Jonah for the same sin – disobedience.

Note: (1:13) The heathen sailors had more concern for one soul (Jonah) than Jonah had for an entire city of souls!

- Disobedience always brings God’s chastening.
- Disobedience affects others – sailors on ship (6-7).
- God’s sovereign control is never thwarted – lot fell on Jonah (7).
- Jonah immediately recognized God’s hand and His sovereignty. If God is over the natural realm (preparing storms and casting lots), then He must certainly be over the spiritual realm.
- God’s mercy and grace – although Jonah deserved death and was at the brink of death, God granted him mercy and spared his life. Jonah understood this and requested that the men of the ship throw him overboard (equivalent to suicide). Meriting death, God granted this prophet life. It is interesting to observe here that these pagan sailors were more responsive to God’s word than Jonah. They prayed to God before Jonah did. They

were also more concerned about life than Jonah was. They attempted to row out the storm before casting him overboard. Their concern over the life of one alien stranger in their midst is in stark contrast to Jonah's lack of concern for an entire city of people. They were also very sensitive to obey and sacrifice, as would be the Ninevites – another contrast to the hard and recalcitrant heart of Jonah.

- Nineveh/Assyria merited death and wrath – God desired to show them mercy and grace as well.

II. Chapter 2: Jonah's response to God's deliverance – a prayer of praise

Jonah's response to God's gracious activity on his behalf is praise and thanksgiving. It is interesting that this is set forth here. Jonah's response to God's gracious activity on behalf of Nineveh is anything but praise and thanksgiving. He prays then as well, but it is a prayer of complaint!

- 2:3 He acknowledges and praises God for His power
- 2:6 He praises God for being his deliverer
- 2:9 He recognizes that salvation is of the Lord – this is spiritual perception.

There was nothing he could do to save or deliver himself. Only God's gracious activity and intervention in his behalf saved him – Salvation is of the Lord!

Note: There is a theological issue related to whether Jonah actually died and was resurrected in the belly of the fish or whether he was preserved alive. Commentators are divided on this score. It is most likely and most natural given the flow of the text that God preserved Jonah alive. This does no violence to the metaphor that Christ used when He employed this very event in Jonah's life as a sign for His death, burial, and resurrection.

III. Chapter 3: Jonah's second chance

God does not owe us a second chance nor does he always give us a second chance! Jonah disobeyed and rebelled and God chose to spare him. However, in I Kings 13 the un-named prophet who disobeyed God and turned aside did not get a second chance – he was eaten by a lion! Point – God's people are not to presume on God's grace. Jonah is not in our Bible to make us comfortable enough with God's grace to disobey. It is there to teach us that when we deserve death and instead get life, it is only by God's grace!

3:5-10 Jonah's message – 5 words long

No mention of mercy – mercy is found in the time frame of 40 days

People respond and the word gets all the way to the palace

The king/national leadership responds and calls for repentance and a fast – external signs of repentance are adopted by the entire nation right down to the animals

The king does not presume. If we turn from our wickedness, perhaps God will turn from the wickedness/disaster that He has determined to bring upon us.

The terms used here are similar to those used of Abram – genuine conversion is most likely in view. (Contrast with the feigned or external turning of Israel at times)

Note the contrast between the king of Nineveh and the kings of Israel. This wicked pagan king who has no reason to fear God or respond to God upon hearing a brief 5 word message from God turns in total repentance.

On the other hand, the kings of Israel who had every reason to love and fear God and to respond to His message would not turn from their wickedness no matter how many “words” or prophets God sent. As a result of their unwillingness to turn from their evil, God was going to turn from the good He had planned for them.

IV. Chapter 4: Jonah’s 2nd rebellion

Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh was greatly successful. Isaiah and Jeremiah loved their nation, and they did not see one convert. Here Jonah hates the people he preaches to and the entire city is converted!

His great success reveals that salvation is not due to the love or compassion of the prophet or even on his willingness to go and speak. Ultimately salvation is only of the Lord. He will save whom He will save! If it had been up to Jonah, Nineveh would have been judged!

4:2 Note Jonah’s argument justifying his irritation with God’s decision to spare Nineveh.

“I didn’t want to obey because I knew that if they repented then you would forgive them, and I wanted to see them judged!”

Jonah is using orthodox theology as an excuse for his disobedience and his cold heart.

4:6 ff God sends a gourd and a worm to teach Jonah a huge lesson – you are so upset over the death of a plant. Why are you not as upset over the possibility of spiritual and physical death of an entire city of people that I created and love just as I created and loved you and created and loved this plant. *“Jonah, why is your heart so cold? Why don’t you want me to have mercy on the creatures that I created and love?”*

The book ends with God speaking and not Jonah – this is as it should be!

Conclusion:

Like Jonah, God’s people often look upon their enemies and desire God’s wrath to fall upon them. It is often difficult to understand and accept the idea that God’s love extends beyond our circle. It is even harder to comprehend that we are just as wicked and offensive in God’s sight as is our enemy.

In effect, even though we would never acknowledge it publicly or openly, there are some people we really hope that God will not save – they merit hell! As we read Jonah, we often discover that we have his heart attitude hiding in our breast.

Thankfully, God is not like us. He will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy. We must also understand that our particular slice of history is not the whole picture. We may be looking at events, nations, and even the work of God through a very narrow and confining window of time. God had mercy upon this wicked and pagan nation. However, He did not forget the injustice done by them upon His people nor did He determine to let it go unchecked forever. One century later the judgment that Jonah so desperately wanted to see would be announced against this city. Her sentence of death would be proclaimed by another prophet named Nahum.

Ten Miracles God did in Jonah		
1.	Lord sent a storm	1:4
2.	Lot fell on Jonah	1:7
3.	Sea stopped raging immediately	1:15
4.	Lord prepared a fish	1:17
5.	Lord caused the fish to swallow Jonah and preserved him alive in the fish	1:17
6.	Lord spoke to the fish and it delivered Jonah on dry land exactly at Nineveh	2:10
7.	God saw their works . . . they turned and then He turned from His anger	3:10
8.	God prepared a plant	4:6
9.	God prepared a worm	4:7

10.	God prepared a wind	4:8
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Nahum
“Where is God’s Goodness and Wrath?”

Introduction:

When people have experienced oppression and have tasted harsh and cruel violence at the hands of another, it is difficult for them to see and believe in God’s goodness. Furthermore, when this evil and harsh condition endures for a prolonged time, God seems even more distant and unconcerned about basic issues such as fairness and justice.

Often the superior strength, size, and resources of the oppressor rob the oppressed of any hope for deliverance. During these conditions the oppressed often begin to doubt God’s goodness or His power. The question of the hour is “Where is God when injustice and cruelty prevail in our midst?”

Not only do the oppressed begin to question God’s ability to deliver, the oppressors whose wickedness seems to go on unpunished and unhindered soon begin to grow unconcerned with any thoughts of God or His righteousness. Their seeming success lulls them into a false security, and believing that God will not or cannot judge, they continue headlong on their wicked path heaping up wickedness upon wickedness.

In both the despair of the oppressed and the wicked confidence of the oppressor, God’s character is called into question. Specifically God is questioned on two issues presented in the following questions: Is God powerful enough to judge and overpower the oppressor, or are they more powerful than He? Is God good and does He care enough to deliver the oppressed and downtrodden?

Often the ordinary affairs of nations and the politics of societies serve as the arena where God’s character is questioned, challenged, and ultimately vindicated. God is powerful as the history of nations declares. God is good and does care about those He created in His own image.

One of the clearest places in the OT where God’s goodness and His righteous power are revealed to both an oppressed nation and to her harsh oppressors is the prophecy uttered by Nahum against the mighty and cruel Assyrian Empire. In this brief prophecy, Nahum assures God’s people everywhere that God and not nations rules and directs the affairs of men. While He is slow to anger and full of mercy, He will not allow injustice and wickedness to go unpunished forever. He will eventually judge and overthrow any person or any nation that stands against Him or His purposes, even if that nation is Assyria and ruled the world of her day! No one is too big or too powerful to escape God’s wrath. And no one who repents is too small or

too downtrodden to be overlooked by God's loving restoration and deliverance. God is powerful, and He is good!

Title:

The book is named after the prophet who preached its message, Nahum. Nahum means *consolation* or *comfort* and is a shortened form of Nehemiah which means "*comfort of Yahweh*."

Author / Date:

Very little information is given about Nahum other than he was from Elkosh, most likely a small village in southern Judah (1:15). Some have suggested that this town was actually in Northern Iraq (near the capital of Assyria, Nineveh). Others have suggested that perhaps this was an OT reference to Capernaum, which means "Town of Nahum." However, while not conclusive, the evidence best accords with Nahum being from a small village in Southern Judah.

The date of his prophecy against Assyria can be established through two important fixed reference points. We know that Nahum is prophesying judgment against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., just as Nahum had predicted. So, we know that his prophecy must have been delivered before 612 B.C. The second fixed point is the reference to the fall and destruction of No-Amon (Thebes), which had already happened in 663 B.C. Thebes was actually rebuilt in 654 B.C., nine years after it fell. Nahum clearly presents Thebes as fallen and destroyed; therefore his prophecy must have come after 663 and prior to 654 B.C. Therefore, we date the book at about 660 B.C.

Historical Background and Setting

Nahum's prophecy against Nineveh comes almost 100 years after another prophet, Jonah, had preached against Nineveh. As a result of Jonah's message, Nineveh repented and was spared. However, it was not long before Nineveh and her citizens returned to their wicked and cruel ways. The revival under Jonah's day had long passed, and no thought for God or His ways was even entertained. Idolatry, cruelty, and wickedness marked this powerful nation, and her kings thought themselves impregnable in their fortress city of Nineveh.

The great revival under Jonah's preaching occurred about 760 B.C., and the city was spared from God's destruction at that time. However, the effects of Nineveh's repentance were only temporary. Soon she was back to old paths of cruelty, idolatry, and wickedness as she crushed anyone and everyone who stood in her way to dominating the world.

In 731 B.C. Ahaz of Judah became a vassal of Tiglath-Pileser III. In 722 B.C. Shalmaneser V invaded Samaria and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel which fell in 721 B.C. (II Kings 17-18).

Twenty years later (701 B.C.) the famous Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah and destroyed 46 different cities and towns on his march to Jerusalem. After surrounding Jerusalem and her king Hezekiah, with a huge military force, God intervened and over 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers were killed overnight (II Kings 18-19).

Sennacherib was succeeded by his son Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.), who imprisoned Manasseh, king of Judah. Esarhaddon was succeeded by his son Ashurbanipal (669-626). He became perhaps the most powerful of all the Assyrian kings. During his reign, he conquered the capital city of Egypt, Thebes. It was also under his reign that Manasseh was released (II Chron. 33:10-13). Shortly after his death, Assyria was defeated when Nineveh fell to the invading Babylonian army in 612 B.C.

Wickedness/Cruelty, Pride, and Idolatry of Assyria

Nahum called Nineveh "the bloody city" (3:1) and declared that this was a city known for its cruelty (3:19). Assyria's history, left etched in marble and stone, certainly confirms that Nahum did not exaggerate.

Nineveh was the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in all of the history of the world. They were at home with evil! Here are the words of their own kings who boasted openly of their cruel acts.

"I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned with fire."
Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.)

"I flayed him (a captured enemy leader), his skin I spread upon the wall of the city." Ashurnasirpal II

"A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames." Shalmaneser II (859-824)

"I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives as one cuts a string. Like the many waters of a storm, I made the contents of their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth. Their hands I cut off."
Sennacherib (705-681)

"I pierced his chin (captured leader) with my keen dagger. Through his jaw I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him, and made him occupy a kennel."
Ashurbanipal (669-626)

“We hung Egyptian corpses on stakes and stripped off their skins and covered the city walls with them.” Ashurbanipal

Second only to cruelty was their pride and arrogance as a nation as seen in the claims and boasts of their kings.

“I am powerful, I am all powerful, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal, I am honored, I am magnified, I am without equal among all kings, the chosen one of Asshur, Nabu, and Markuk.” Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.)

“I am Ashurbanipal, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria. The great gods magnified my name; they made my rule powerful.” Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.C.)

All of their acts of wickedness came as a result of spiritual wickedness. Assyria was a nation given wholly over to idolatry.

“As for those common men who had spoken derogatory things against my god Asher and had plotted against me, the prince who reveres him, I tore out their tongues and abased them. As a posthumous offering I smashed the rest of the people alive by the very figures of the protective deities between which they had smashed Sennacherib my grandfather. Their cut up flesh I fed to the dogs, swine, jackals, birds, vultures, to the birds of the sky, and to the fishes of the deep pools.” Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.C.)

Against this Colossus of Evil, God sent a messenger of judgment, Nahum, to declare that God was against them, and prepare as they might, they would not survive His righteous wrath!

Theological Themes

Nahum is the natural sequel to the book of Jonah. It is the “rest of the story” in relationship to God’s dealings with Assyria. Both Jonah and Nahum draw attention to the character of God. Jonah highlights God’s love in mercy and His unbelievable patience with wicked men. Front and center is the forgiving grace of God. Nahum draws attention to another side of God’s gracious dealing with His creatures – judgment and punishment for sin. God’s love for truth and His righteous and holy character assure that though He is full of mercy and slow to wrath, He will act against sin and sinful men.

Jonah (4:2) highlights God as a gracious and forgiving God as Moses revealed in Exodus 36:6 (He is slow to wrath). Nahum (1:3) quotes the last half of Moses’ statement to remind the reader/hearer that “He will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Ex. 34:7). Although God is slow to wrath, punishment is certain and sure for unrepentant sinners!

Nahum's Message

Nahum has arranged his three chapters to highlight six specific truths that were to be a comfort to God's oppressed people.

B. An Avenger Is Our Lord (1:1-11)

Nahum begins by revealing the identity and character of the One who will bring such devastating judgment upon such a powerful nation as Assyria.

Judah had seen the unbelievable destruction that had been heaped on her sister nation Israel by Assyria. She herself was living under the heavy hand of this oppressive nation. Not even the might of Egypt had been able to stand against Assyria (the mighty and powerfully defended city of Thebes had fallen). So who would be able to even conceive of attacking and defeating such a powerful and dominating nation?

Nahum reveals that God Himself will rise up and take on Assyria. He reveals four specific things about God's character to the reader.

1. *This God is a God of vengeance (1:2-3)*

Nahum starts out by establishing the reason for the divine sentence of death on Nineveh – “God is a jealous God!” (1:2) Nahum mentions God ten times in chapter one to establish that it is God Himself who is going to take on Nineveh.

2. *This God is a Powerful God (1:3-6)*

No one should doubt God's ability to carry out this divine judgment! All of nature itself trembles when God steps out as Warrior – all except the nation upon whom His wrath is about to be poured!

3. *This God is a Good God (1:7-8)*

Nahum quickly follows this fierce description of God with a reminder to the reader that God is good and a stronghold in trouble to those who trust in Him (1:7). Rather than trusting in the strength of their defenses, walls, and military leaders, those who wished to escape God's severe judgment should flee to Him!

4. *This God is a God who will judge severely (1:9-11)*

Because Nineveh had plotted evil against the Lord (1:11), so severe would be her judgment that there would be no second occasion for evil – “affliction will not arise a second time!” (1:9)

This is a great lesson for all of us today. If we do not leave our wicked ways and if we do not stop trusting in our religious externals, like Nineveh, we will experience the fierce and powerful anger of a righteous and good God!

II. The Wicked One Shall Exist No More (1:12-15)

Judah is given assurance here in this section that God will liberate and deliver them from the Assyrian yoke. This is communicated implicitly in that Judah is given a front row seat to observe God’s divine nature in full operation against Nineveh. If God has the power and ability to destroy a world power like Assyria, then surely He has the power to deliver His own chosen people if they repent.

A. God will liberate the Afflicted (1:12-13)

The great assurance to Judah is seen in the phrase “thus says the Lord” (1:12). They have seen the fulfillment of many “thus says the Lord” in the destruction upon Samaria/Israel. Now, this phrase is intentionally used to assure them that God will judge the Assyrians and in so doing, will liberate the afflicted.

B. God will judge the Oppressor (1:14)

God has issued a commandment that Nineveh be judged. He has declared that the name of Assyria will no longer be perpetuated. Their gods and temples will be destroyed. God has already dug the grave in which He will bury this vile and evil nation. Everything they had built, a name, a fortune, security, a reputation, power, all would vanish in a night!

C. God will announce the Good News (1:15)

Nahum instructs the people to “Behold” -- see what God has orchestrated. They are to look for the news of this demise as it travels and spreads throughout the mountains and valleys.

They are to keep their appointed feasts and vows at Jerusalem. They would no longer have to fear the repercussions of worshipping God as He commanded as in the past from Assyria.

III. The Lion of Assyria Will Be Routed (2:1-13)

Assyria had depicted herself in her sculptures and art as a powerful lion. However, the true Lion would arrive on the scene and route and destroy this self proclaimed lion from its lair. This would happen:

A. *In spite of any preparation Nineveh could make (2:1)*

Nahum taunts Nineveh by giving urgent commands and exhortations to man the forts and make strong preparations for the attack. Do everything you can to prepare; God is on His way to judge!

B. *In order to restore the excellency of Israel (2:2)*

God will do to Nineveh what they have done to Israel; they will be emptied out and made vile. Jacob will be restored and made excellent!

C. *In the swift advance of the Attack (2:3-5)*

Nahum uses the prophetic perfect to depict the surety and swiftness of the attack against Nineveh.

D. *In the utter collapse of her defenses (2:6-10)*

Nineveh's defenses and troops would be about as useful as a "pool of water" that had escaped from the irrigation ditch or river bed.

E. *In the finality of God's judgment (2:11-13)*

Earlier, one of Assyria's kings had marched through Judah and come right to the gates of Jerusalem. His commanding general, Rabshakeh, had taunted, "Where are you going to get any help that will stop me and my armies? (II Kings 18:34)

Here God is taunting them – "I am against you!" (2:13). Where is the dwelling of the lions and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness and the lion's cub?" (2:11)

The lion of Assyria had roared in arrogance and cruelty. Now the Lion from Judah would have the last roar! This Lion easily and completely destroyed the Assyrian lion and left her den empty and torn down never to be inhabited again.

IV. *The Harlot Will Be Exposed and Disgraced (3:1-7)*

Chapter 3 begins the third judgment oracle by calling down a “woe” upon Nineveh.

God has examined Assyria and will now expose her sins for all to see! These sins are listed out in graphic detail in 3:1-4. Not only will her sins be exposed but God will also reveal her unfaithfulness in 3:5-7.

God will thoroughly expose the vileness and wickedness of this nation and will then publicly and openly disgrace and humiliate her before the watching world. What would happen to Nineveh would not be done quietly but openly! All the world would know!

V. The Invincible Will Be Destroyed (3:8-13)

This section is the fourth and last oracle of judgment. In this taunt song, Nineveh is presented as a drunken man, too weak and helpless to even hurt others much less to save herself.

Nineveh had presented herself to the world as a powerful and invincible force. You would have to deal carefully with such a nation. However, God has exposed Nineveh in a completely different picture!

Nineveh has been pictured in this book as a powerless and defeated lion, as a wicked and disgraced harlot, and now as a weak and senseless drunk. This powerful and invincible nation had fallen (3:8-10), and this once strong nation was now helpless (3:11-13).

VI. Free At Last (3:14-19)

Nahum begins with a hymn (1:2-11) celebrating God’s character and His ability to avenge evil (1:11).

Nahum ends with two songs (taunt songs) that assure Judah that evil will be overcome.

The first taunt song is directed to the inhabitants and leaders of Nineveh where they are instructed to fight as hard as they could for the survival of Nineveh (3:14-17). Every precaution needed to be taken – store up enough water, reinforce every weak place in your walls, store up bricks to repair any damage to your walls. However – all of this would be in vain for the “fire will devour you, the sword will cut you off; it will eat you like a locust!” (3:15).

Fight, Fight, Fight all you want, taunts Nahum; it will not help you at all! You have been judged and sentenced by One more powerful than you!

The second song (also a taunt song against Nineveh) is directed to Judah (3:18-19). All who hear the news of the scattering of your leaders and the demise of your

nation will “clap their hands over you!” (3:19). When the sentence against Nineveh is carried out, all the world will clap with joy and approval!

The book of Nahum concludes with a theological note: “for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?” The effect of Assyria’s sins was as universal as her empire; her wickedness had been exported to all the ancient world. The note here forms an inclusion with 1:11. Assyria’s evil and wickedness were central concerns of God and Nahum’s prophecy. Now God had answered. As widespread as her evil and wickedness had been so would be the news of God’s judgment upon Nineveh.

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Habakkuk
“Living By Faith When God Seems Invisible”

Introduction:

The life of faith may seem relatively easy to accomplish in the context of worship and religious activity. In the beauty and wonder of religious ceremony, God seems unusually close, and it is not difficult to see and sense His presence and be reminded of His goodness and blessing. When all is well in life and God’s blessing is evident and abounds, it is easy to praise, worship, and live faithfully before Him.

However, frequently God’s justified people struggle to live faithfully before God when God seems distant or even absent when daily ordinary life gets difficult and tiresome.

What adds to this difficulty is the fact that often, God’s ways do not seem compatible with what we know about His character. For example, how can a good and loving God allow evil things to happen to His beloved children? If God is all powerful and all loving, why does He allow His children to suffer? Why does He allow His program to seemingly be thwarted by wicked men?

Perhaps the hardest question of all is the age old question – “If God is who He says He is, then why do the wicked prosper? Asaph, the songwriter of ancient Israel addressed this very question candidly and forthrightly in Psalm 73. He started out by acknowledging what he knew to be true about God – *“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.”*

However, he went on to admit that the contradiction between this theological truth and his personal experience nearly destroyed him – *“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.”*

What was it that caused this near spiritual disaster? His observation that the wicked seem to prosper and the Godly seem to suffer!

This question was not unique to Asaph. God’s people in every generation and under every conceivable set of circumstances have wrestled with the issue of why the wicked prosper. More importantly, how are we to respond when evil triumphs and wicked men prosper? What are we to do when life seems unfair? How are we to respond when all around us are troubles and difficulties – and God seems distant or even absent?

The best answer to all of this is found in the short but powerful prophecy of an Old Testament preacher by the name of Habakkuk. His prophecy articulates the question, “Why do God’s actions at times seem contrary to His nature?” – All of us have at times wanted to ask this question. More important than God’s answer to the question is Habakkuk’s response to his circumstance.

What is the godly man to do when evil triumphs and God seems absent? He is to live by faith! His book contains the secret to developing a “Faith for Bad Times.”

Title:

This book takes its name from its author, Habakkuk. The name “Habakkuk” means *ardent embrace* or *one who embraces* (1:1; 3:1). It is interesting to note that he begins by questioning God and ends by embracing God in a song of praise even though God had not chosen to change or alter his difficult circumstance.

Author and Date:

Almost nothing is known about Habakkuk other than his name and his office – that of a prophet. He prophesied to the Southern Kingdom, Judah, sometime before the Babylonians carried them away into captivity. It seems best to date Habakkuk in this period 612–605 B.C.

Historical Background:

Times were not good for Israel in Habakkuk’s day. It had been approximately one hundred years since God had brought His devastating judgment upon the 10 Northern tribes of Israel. The Assyrian nation had eventually come up against Judah – in fact one of their kings, Sennacherib, had even surrounded Jerusalem and laid siege to King Hezekiah’s army. Who had not heard the story of his commanding general taunting Hezekiah and his army? That night over 180,000 Assyrian soldiers perished and Sennacherib retreated to Nineveh. Of course, to hear him recount the story in the annals of history, his version was slightly different. According to him, his army had shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage. Amazingly, there is no mention of the deaths of his troops. Nor does he give a reason why he did not finish Hezekiah and destroy Jerusalem. However, all of Judah knew the real story. Behind Sennacherib’s defeat was the powerful intervention of God!

However, those days were long gone and with them the brief revival and renewal that came through Hezekiah’s efforts. Now, almost a century later, God’s people were just as wicked if not more so than they were before Hezekiah’s famous repentance! In short order, Judah was back to her old ways – wickedness, idolatry, and injustice were once again the order of the day! Against this backdrop of wickedness running wild in Judah, one righteous man stands and asks God a question – “Lord, How long are you going to let this wickedness among your people go on unchecked and unjudged?”

Outline and Message:

Habakkuk carefully constructs his prophecy into 8 specific divisions as follows:

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. | First Complaint to God | 1:2-4 |
| 2. | God's First Response | 1:5-11 |
| 3. | Second Complaint to God | 1:12-17 |
| 4. | Prophet's Decision to Wait for God's Answer | 2:1 |
| 5. | God's Second Response | 2:2-5 |
| 6. | God's 5 Woes Against Babylon | 2:6-20 |
| 7. | Habakkuk's Prayer | 3:1-15 |
| 8. | Habakkuk's Decision to Rejoice in the Lord | 3:16-19 |

The following represents a simple outline of the book:

<i>The Structure and Outline of Habakkuk</i>		
A Burden	A Vision	A Prayer
Habakkuk Complains	Habakkuk Listens	Habakkuk Prays
Punishment of Judah	Punishment of Babylon	Power of God
<i>Chapter 1</i>	<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>Chapter 3</i>
Faith Faces a Problem (Faith out of Focus)	Faith Finds a Solutions (Faith in Corrected Focus)	Faith Full of Assurance (20/20 Faith)

Note: There are 10 other Psalm / Songs in Scripture (MacArthur Study Bible Notes)

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|-----|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | The Song of Deliverance | Exodus 15:1-18 |
| 2. | The Song of Moses | Deuteronomy 32:1-43 |
| 3. | The Song of Deborah | Judges 5:1-31 |
| 4. | The Song of Hannah | I Samuel 2:1-10 |
| 5. | The Song of the Women | I Samuel 18:6-7 |
| 6. | The Song of David | II Samuel 22:1-51 |
| 7. | The Song of Hezekiah | Isaiah 38:9-20 |
| 8. | The Song of Jonah | Jonah 2:1-9 |
| 9. | The Song of Habakkuk | Habakkuk 3:1-19 |
| 10. | The Song of Mary | Luke 1:45-46 |

Habakkuk's Message:

As one reads through the words of this prophecy, it is clear that Habakkuk was not speaking as a casual observer with an interesting theological perplexity. His questions rose out of the pressure of life! What he saw and felt created in him questions about what He knew and believed to be true about God. His theology did not match up with his experience – and in the crucible of crisis, God was about to strengthen Habakkuk’s ability to believe in the unseen and live accordingly – by faith and not by sight!

I. Waiting For God’s Intervention – 1:1 – 2:1

This first section consists of two complaints by Habakkuk and God’s first answer. Habakkuk begins by articulating a “burden” he “saw.”

This is somewhat unusual – normally a prophet would receive the “burden” from God and speak it to the people. In Habakkuk’s case, the burden was his own – received from what he saw going on around him, and it motivated him to speak to God in prayer.

His first complaint is articulated in terms of what God had caused him to see going on in the nation of Judah. God had “showed him iniquity and caused him to see trouble” (1:3). Strife and plundering were a constant sight before his eyes. As a result, the law was powerless and injustice and wickedness prevailed. He uses the same word here to describe the violence of the land that Moses used in Genesis to describe the moral condition of the earth before the flood!

At the heart of his complaint was a frustration with God’s seeming toleration of the wicked and violent ways of His people. How long will you tolerate? Why do you continue to show me the triumph of evil rather than your gracious intervention?

A. Our Distress over Immoral Conditions Around Us -- (1:2-4)

Habakkuk used 6 different terms to describe the depravity going on around him – violence, injustice, wrong, destruction, strife, and conflict. Society had sunk to despicable lows. What made this even more painful was that all of this came about in 12 short years – just 12 years earlier these same people had witnessed God’s gracious intervention in the revival He sent under King Josiah in 621 B.C. (II Kings 22:8-20).

Clearly and understandably, Habakkuk was deeply troubled by what he saw going on around him – and God was strangely silent. So, he lifts

up his voice and cries out to God. In this cry comes his first question / complaint to God.

1. *Our Distress seen in our Sensitivity to Wrong - (1:2-3)*

Habakkuk asks God four simple questions – two beginning with the phrase “How long?” and two beginning with the phrase “Why?”. His questions come in the form of a poetic lament, and they express his heart’s affliction as to why God has not intervened to right the wrong that was so obviously going on around him.

In none of this does Habakkuk ever express doubt in God’s ability to help. That is never a question for him. He knows God can judge and deliver – the issue for Habakkuk is why God has chosen not to act up to this point. Why has God tolerated this wickedness for so long?

He cries out (1:2) to God – so deep is his distress over what he sees that he literally ‘shouts’ or ‘roars’ out his frustration to God when he considers the violence going on among God’s people.

Habakkuk presents the violence is pervasive throughout the entire nation. Five times we are reminded of how violent the nation has become (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17). This word is the same word used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the world that God judged in Noah’s day. The implicit question is this – “Lord, if you didn’t tolerate this in Noah’s day but sent a flood –why do you tolerate it now?”

2. *Our Distress seen in our Helplessness in the Pervasive Presence of Wrong (1:3)*

Not only is Habakkuk sensitive to what is going on around him – he observes that he is completely powerless in the face of such pervasive wickedness – he can’t do anything to stem the tide!

He uses terminology associated with sight to indicate his distress! “God, you are showing me iniquity and forcing me to see trouble.”

Strife, contention, plundering, and violence are always present before me – everywhere I turn, I see this going on. Not only does it go on in every place, but it goes on all the time!

3. *Our Distress seen in the Loss of Law and Justice (1:4)*

So pervasive and powerful was evil in the land that the law had become paralyzed and powerless! True justice of any kind had vanished from the land, and the righteous were being oppressed on every side!

Habakkuk's distress drove him to God in prayer! Often when we see the kinds of things that Habakkuk saw, we are tempted to abandon God and His ways. Not so for Habakkuk! What he saw frustrated him but he took his frustrations and his questions to the proper place – to the presence of God in prayer! This is the way of faith – this is the life of a faithful man even when the fabric of society around him has come apart at the seams.

B. *Our Amazement Over God's Decisive Intervention – (1:5-11)*

God chooses to answer Habakkuk's complaint. In so doing, He takes up Habakkuk's image of "sight." Habakkuk was frustrated because he believed that by not acting, God was showing him violence and making him see trouble on every side.

God now instructs Habakkuk (and the entire nation – note the 2nd person plurals) to "Look! Watch! – and be utterly astounded/amazed! (1:5)

Far from being distant, uninvolved, and inactive – God was about to announce a work that would amaze all who heard – and it would come to pass before their eyes!

1. *Our Amazement in His Unbelievable Work (1:5)*

God begins His answer to Habakkuk by instructing him to "watch" and "look" – be ready to be amazed at what I am going to do!

God was about to do a work so great and so unexpected that no one who heard it would have ever believed God would do this thing!

God was about to address the injustice and the violence in such a way as to leave no questions in the minds of those who would see it happen.

2. *Our Amazement in His Use of Wicked Instruments (1:6-11)*

God goes on to reveal that He is moving to judge the evil of His people – but – He will do this in a shocking way! He is personally raising up a wicked nation – the Chaldeans (Babylonians) – to do this work of judgment.

This new nation would be rough and savage – killing, ravaging, and destroying everything in their path to power. They would be utterly “lawless” (1:6-11).

There is some poetic justice here – violent and lawless Judah would be herself judged and violated by a nation that was known for violence and lawlessness. They who troubled others would now be troubled by “troublers!”

God’s answer to Habakkuk’s first question – “How long?” – is “Not very long! I am raising up the nation that I have appointed to judge you, and they are on their way!”

Instead of producing quietness and rest, God’s answer actually created additional distress for the prophet.

C. Our Distress Over God’s Use of the Wicked – (1:12 – 2:1)

Habakkuk carefully raises another concern. “Now that I know what You are planning to do and when You are planning to do it – I have a bigger question. Knowing what I know about Your holiness (1:12) and unchangeable character (1:12), I am convinced that you will not abandon us nor forget your promises and plans for us as a nation – “we shall not die” (1:12). However, I am shocked! Given Who You are (holy and just), how can You use this wicked nation to do Your righteous work?

1. Distressed because God’s action was so contrary to His name (1:12)

In the first part of his prayer, Habakkuk expressed impatience with God’s inactivity. Here he expresses perplexity over God’s declared action.

Habakkuk begins his second question by asking a rhetorical question – “Are you not from everlasting?” This is followed by two names/titles for God -- “Holy One” and “Rock” (1:12) – names that addressed God’s holy and unchangeable character. NOTE: In the OT God’s names were often descriptions of some aspect of His person or work.

God's determination to use the pagan Babylonians seemed to directly contradict everything that God was and represented.

2. *Distressed because God's action was so contrary to His nature (1:12-13)*

Here Habakkuk calls attention to God's purity – He describes God as being of “pure eyes” (1:13), indicating God's unwillingness to look favorably on sin and treat wickedness casually.

Given this aspect of God's nature, why would He look with apparent favor on such a wicked and vile nation? Why would He hold His righteous tongue and keep silent when a wicked nation would destroy and devour another nation more righteous than themselves?

3. *Distressed because God's action was contrary to His justice (1:14-17)*

This Babylonian nation that God had determined to raise up against Israel was far more wicked than Israel!

They were good at doing bad! They took violence to new levels. They viewed men and nations as little more than fish that they could gather in their nets and drag away with their hooks.

In fact, they worshiped the very things by which they brought about so much violence. Rather than attribute their success to God, they believed they had gathered their agenda and conquered men because of their own might and through the power of their own gods!

In fact, so hungry are they for more wealth, more victories, and more prisoners that as soon as their nets are filled, they empty them and rush back out to fill them up again with more prisoners taken by violence.

Here is Habakkuk's point – “God, if You are going to bring righteous judgment upon Your people Judah for their violence and wickedness, why would You use a nation that is even more wicked and violent (Babylon) to do this?” When it comes to violence and wickedness, Babylon makes Judah look like a Sunday School class!

Note: Habakkuk has made his second complaint and asked His question – He is absolutely convinced that no matter what evidence to the contrary is going on around him, God is righteous! Like a Rock,

His purposes for and promises to His people are unchanging and dependable!

With this in mind, Habakkuk reaches two important conclusions:

- a. We will not die! God will not abandon us nor forget His righteous plan and promise to us. Come what may around us – even judgment from God’s own hand. We will not be completely cut off! (1:12)
- b. I will wait for God and ask Him to adjust my perspective (2:1)

Like a watchman climbing up his watchtower waiting to receive the news of the hour, Habakkuk will patiently and expectantly wait for God to give answer and explain His works. When God has adjusted (corrected his thinking), then Habakkuk will preach to others.

So often we charge God foolishly; then when God’s answer does not conform to our thinking, we judge God! Not Habakkuk. The man who lives by faith will constantly and faithfully wait for God to set all things right, including his own personal thinking about the matter! There are some important reminders for us as God’s people as we sit upon our “watch-tower” waiting for God to answer.

First, we are to remember that righteousness is not optional for us no matter what the circumstances around us may be or how confusing God’s actions (or lack of action) may be to us at the moment. We are called to obey even when we don’t understand.

Second, we are to remember that all of history is really more about God and not about men. We must view history from God’s perspective and not our own. Consistently, God’s actions will eventually reveal the truth that righteousness exalts a nation (or an individual) and sin is a reproach to a people (Proverbs 14:34).

Finally, we are to rest patiently on God’s character. He is the holy One. He is the rock! There is enough purity and stability in Him to fulfill all we need in times of crisis!

II. Learning to Live by Faith – 2:2-20

So what is the godly man to do when the wicked seem to prosper? He is to continue to be godly. He is to continue to faithfully wait upon the Lord and to serve Him in gladness and righteousness. In short, the godly man must live by faith when his world is up-side down!

A. *The Proclamation of Faith (2:2)*

“Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it!”

Finally, God’s answer arrives. He instructs Habakkuk to do three specific things.

- 1) He is to preserve the Answer/Vision – by writing it down on tablets of stone.

In this statement, God gives Habakkuk similar instructions to the ones He gave Moses for the inscribing of the 10 Commandments on two tablets of stone. God’s answer for life and blessing in Moses’ day were preserved on tablets of stone – so God’s answer for blessing during Habakkuk’s day were to be written on tablets!

There does seem to be a very clear allusion to Moses and the establishing of the covenant. God’s answer to Habakkuk is a very significant and important truth!

- 2) He is to proclaim the Answer/Vision clearly and plainly

Not only is this answer so important that it must be permanently preserved – it must be plainly stated and made available to all!

This was not just a private word of comfort to a curious and confused prophet – this was intended to be for all of God’s people.

- 3) He is to perform according to the Answer/Vision

“That he may run who reads it”

There is debate as to what this phrase means. One idea is that Habakkuk was to make the answer so clear and so plain that a person running by would be able to read the message without having to stop!

A better interpretation views the word “run” as a reference for living and ordering your life. As one read the message, he would then organize and live his life accordingly. In other words, he was to perform and act according to the vision!

His life would be marked by an obedience of faith!

B. *The Implementation of Faith (2:3)*

God assures Habakkuk that what He was about to reveal to Him would in fact come to pass in its appointed time. Habakkuk was to wait patiently for God to act – in His time and in His way!

God has appointed a specific time for His intervention – though it may seem long to Habakkuk – it will not be delayed! God’s plans and time tables are never affected by man! He will act at exactly the appointed time, and though it seem to be delayed to us, it will come right on God’s schedule.

C. *The Revelation of Faith (2:4-5)*

These verses contain the central phrase to all of God’s dealings with His people in any age – “The just shall live by faith!”

As the tablets given to Moses revealed the way of life and blessing, so the message Habakkuk engraved on these tablets would reveal the way to true life!

God contrasts the man who lives by faith and the proud man. The man who is proud has a soul that is not upright – He is lost! Rather than looking to God and trusting Him, this man looks to himself and takes pride in his abilities and agendas. At the heart of pride is self – self-reliance, self-gratification, self-independence. At the heart of faith is dependence on another – in this case God! Whereas the proud man has an unsaved soul, the man who lives by faith is called just. He is saved!

There are some who argue that Habakkuk is simply observing that the righteous man who continues to live faithfully to God’s covenant law will live – will be preserved from judgment. In this view, “faith” is simply another term for “faithfulness.”

However, Habakkuk seems to be saying more than this. Like Abraham of old, a man who depends totally on God – who has faith – is made just. Because of His faith, and as a result of being just, he will live!

There is no doubt that both Testaments teach that the justified man will live in faithful obedience. Faithfulness (obedience) is the fruit of saving faith.

So, in contrast to the proud and independent Babylonians whom God will ultimately destroy, Habakkuk announces that God will give life to all who give up their independence and turn to Him in faith! Such ones will evidence faithfulness in their lives as they wait for their deliverance.

D. *The Vindication of Faith (2:6-20)*

God proceeds to announce five “Woe” oracles upon Babylon the proud. In contrast to the just man who because of his faith in God would live, this proud and independent nation who looked to themselves and not to God, would die!

God proclaims their immanent and sure demise in a series of five very graphic “woe” statements designed to show what He would do against them for their sins. Each woe is stated in terms of poetic justice indicating that God would devise a punishment according to the crime.

1. *The Plunder would be Plundered (2:6-8)*

Babylon is depicted as having increased goods by seizing and taking the goods of another – now what he had taken would be taken from him. He who had so often plundered would now be thoroughly plundered!

2. *The Secure would be Exposed (2:9-11)*

Babylon had a lust for power; they thirsted for conquests! In order to establish a secure place where they could plunder and pillage in safety, they attempted to set up an invincible city! Like a bird of prey who built its nest high on a rock or crag, Babylon sinned without fear because they believed they dwelled in safety.

God would eventually tear down their “safe nest,” and the very materials used in the constructions would cry out against this nation!

3. *The Expansionist would be Thwarted/Reduced (2:12-14)*

Babylon boasted in her buildings and in the expansion of her empire and power throughout the world!

She would often conscript workers from those she captured and have them build monuments and cities to spread her glory and power – God said all of this would be in vain! Her workers would build, but what they built would end up burned with fire! It would not last. In spite of her best efforts to expand her influence and power to all the earth, Babylon would soon be toppled and destroyed – even her memory would fade until no one even remembered her mighty kings and monuments.

In contrast – God’s influence and power would spread throughout the whole earth! All the world would know Him! (2:14)

4. *The Shameless would be Shamed (2:15-17)*

In their violent pursuit of power – there was no limit to the shameful deeds this nation would do against other nations, lands, and people! Babylon was a nation known for drunkenness (e.g. Belshazzar). Often they would use drink to get others to do shameful and abhorrent deeds.

However, now they would be the ones forced to drink – this time the cup of wine would be forced down their throats by the right hand of Jehovah!

They would now be the ones exposed and shamed before the world!

5. *The Idolater would be Powerless (2:18-20)*

The final woe is pronounced against them for their worship and attendance to lifeless idols. Rather than devote their attention and service to the true God of Heaven, they were willing to serve and attend to lifeless idols made by their own hands.

At the heart of idolatry is the worship of what I have made. In essence, I have become the creator of my own god! In worshipping the work of my hand, inevitably, I am worshipping myself!

Perhaps this is the clearest and most graphic contrast between the man who has been justified and the unrighteous man. The just (justified) man has been declared righteous because he has placed his belief and trust in God. The proud and arrogant man has remained condemned because he has placed his trust and belief in the work of his own hands – idols.

While the Babylonians were busy dressing their idols in gold and waking them up and appealing to them for teaching, God was in His holy temple! While the lifeless idols needed the Babylonians to speak and call their names to create for them an existence, God was so real and powerful that the entire earth was silent before Him! While the Babylonians had to provide for and protect their gods, God provided for and protected His people!

III. Responding to God's Presence in History – 3:1-15

As Habakkuk reflects on all that God has commanded him to write down, he was also given a picture of God's future work in His world – to judge wicked nations, to chastise a disobedient people, to build His glorious Kingdom!

Habakkuk responds to this fearsome and awesome revelation by pouring out his heart in praying and singing. As he faced the future work of God, he worshipped! In His worship he drew strength for himself and for others by reflecting and recounting the wonderful and at times terrible work that God had done in the past!

A. By Means of a Prayer

When Habakkuk heard God's answer to his questions, his first response was to obey God and write down the vision. His second response was to utter a prayer.

In this prayer, he acknowledges openly that God's speech had produced fear in his heart. How would he handle his fear? By focusing on God's works of the past and remembering the future works that God had promised to do! He handled his fear by focusing on the person and character of God!

He makes three specific petitions in his prayer of faith:

1. *First, Habakkuk asks God to revive his work.*

What Habakkuk is really asking for here is that God would revive the work necessary for the carrying out of His program and purpose.

In this case, Habakkuk may actually be praying for God to do the work of judgment and discipline that must be done before the glorious work of setting up the kingdom can proceed. In a very real sense, this petition is the OT version of the NT prayer "Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come!"

Far from praying selfishly, Habakkuk models the prayer of faith. Lord, do whatever work has to be done in order for your ultimate purpose to be accomplished – no matter what that work may mean for me!

2. *Second, he asks God for understanding.*

Habakkuk asked that in the midst of the years – while this was going on in the present world – that God would make His work clear and known!

Habakkuk, like Aseph before him, had agonized over the seeming incompatibility between what God was doing or not doing in the world around him and the character of God. God had graciously given him a wonderful and clarifying explanation. Habakkuk longs for others to see this – so that they might rightly understand God’s actions and His purpose and respond as people of faith should respond – in faithfulness!

3. *Third, he asks for God to be merciful in the midst of discipline.*

The word “wrath” here carries the idea of strong disturbance or troubling. Judah was facing a time when she would be shaken to her very foundations. Everything that defined her as a nation externally would be taken from her – her king, her Jerusalem, her temple, her freedom, and even the visible presence of her God. In all of this necessary “shaking,” Habakkuk pleads for God to remember mercy in this midst of His necessary but painful discipline.

B. By Means of a Psalm

In times of trouble when God seems distant or absent, God’s faithful people have always encouraged others by singing. Often the intent of their song is to get a doubting and at times disobedient people to focus on God’s plan and purpose for them both in the immediate circumstance as well as in the distant future.

One very effective way to accomplish this is to direct people to the future by pointing them to the past!

In this song/psalm, Habakkuk recounts the mighty deeds and acts of God for His people throughout their history as His chosen nation. He reminds them in this song of God’s deliverance from Egypt. In graphic language with creation as primary participants, Habakkuk walks the nation through the path of God’s deliverance from Egypt in the days of Moses and the early judges (Othniel and Gideon 3:7). God did all of this for the express purpose of delivering and saving His people (3:13).

What God did in the past, He would do again in the future!

Note: 3:14 may be a reference here to God’s ultimate victory over Satan as well as a historical reference to Pharaoh who was destroyed

by God for persecuting His people and refusing to let them go from Egypt.

IV. Rejoicing in God in Trying Times – 3:16-19

So how does it all end? What is to be our final response? How did Habakkuk respond to all that God revealed in answering his original questions? He responded with the same response God desires from all who live by faith – with a resounding “yes!” to God’s purposes and plans!

A. *Yes, in the Midst of Present Anguish--(3:16)*

Habakkuk acknowledged that he “heard” God’s answer, and it had a profound physical effect on him. His body trembled. His lips quivered at the thought of what God was about to do. His bones ached and lacked strength. His legs trembled so they could not support him!

Even though he understood and accepted God’s decision to use the Babylonians to discipline Judah, he fully recognized what this meant in real life, and it produced deep sorrow, anguish, and even fear!

In the midst of this description of his fear is a request that he would rest (be at ease and trust) in that day when God would trouble Judah. As painful as the experience was just thinking about what God would do, Habakkuk prays that he will not resist God when God actually brings about the judgment!

B. *Yes, in Spite of Anticipated Adversity—(3:17)*

Habakkuk realized that the day had come and gone for repentance. Judah had squandered away her last opportunity to avert God’s judgment. It would come with terrifying certainty. And it would bring devastating consequences and hardship for everyone who dwelt in the nation – righteous and unrighteous.

Knowing all of this, Habakkuk determines that God’s purposes are more important than His personal provision and well being.

If having no figs, grapes, olives, or sheep would advance the grand purpose of a loving and wise God, then Habakkuk was for it!

C. *Yes, our Prayer of Resolute Commitment—(3:18)*

We must be careful to note that this was not a stoic acceptance to endure at all costs – to take whatever would come and survive. Habakkuk was determined to do more than just endure for God, he was

absolutely determined to enjoy God no matter what was going on around him.

In the midst of all the material want that would come (no figs, no olives, no herds, and no flocks) as a result of this judgment, Habakkuk determined that he would rejoice! His joy would not be in his circumstances but in His relationship with God! God would be His joy and His strength.

When God is our joy and strength, then it matters not what work He is about, be it retribution and just judgment or restoration and mercy.

When God is our focus, He will be our joy! (c.f. Nehemiah 8:10)

Conclusion:

Habakkuk contains the best declaration of what it means for justified men and women to live by faith. Faith here is more than salvific or theological; it is personal and practical. It operates in the market place of life when crops fail and troubles come. God did not have to always provide health, wealth, and happiness so that the man who lived by faith would continue to live faithfully rejoicing in God. This man had trusted God with eternal matters; he would confidently continue forward believing that God was trustworthy in earthly mundane matters no matter how difficult and dark the days might be. People who have been made just by faith really live! And they live faithfully all the time! No matter when, where, or what is going on around them. When life falls apart at the seams, the man who lives by faith goes forward rejoicing in the God in whom he has believed!

Minor Prophets
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Zephaniah
“Seek God Before the Day of the Lord”

Introduction

Most thinking people who have some awareness of God know that He will eventually punish wicked deeds and wicked men. Many want to make peace with God before Judgment Day comes, but they don't want to make that peace today.

The problem with this approach to God's judgment is perhaps not as obvious as one might think. Most people would immediately object to this approach by observing that one never quite knows just when that Day of Judgment may come. However, this approach to God's grace reveals an even greater evil than simply assuming that there will always be time for repentance. People who approach God and presume on His grace do so out of a cavalier or high-handed spirit. They want to repent on their terms and in their time, when and only when they are good and ready to do so!

A central responsibility for any messenger from God is to warn God's people who are thinking in this way that this presumptuous and high-handed approach to God is fraught with danger. God's messenger must warn that God is announcing the coming of His day of judgment and to persuade them to humble themselves before God and to seek Him while He may yet be found. This choice is the most decisive choices a man will ever make. It is literally often a life or death choice!

No prophet more adequately presented the case for repentance in the face of coming wrath from God (both immediate and final) than Zephaniah. His name means “God will hide,” and his message is that in order to be safely hidden by God when that great day of His wrath arrives, Judah needed to seek the Lord now while there was yet time.

As in our day, most of Zephaniah's hearers rejected his message. Believing there was still plenty of time, they rushed headlong into a small temporal foretaste of God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians. As fierce as their wrath and destruction was, it did not compare to what Zephaniah described God's final day of wrath – “The Day of the Lord” – would be like.

To the reader/hearer of every generation, Zephaniah's message is the same – Do not presume on God's grace! Seek the Lord while He may still be found or prepare to meet the consequences!

Title:

The book bears the name of the prophet who uttered the prophecy. Zephaniah means “The Lord Hides” or “Jehovah Hides,” and it is possible that Zephaniah has this meaning in mind in 2:3.

Author / Date

Zephaniah traces his lineage back four generations to his great, great grandfather Hezekiah. If this is the Godly King Hezekiah of Judah who reigned from 715-686 B.C., then Zephaniah was the only OT prophet to be of direct royal lineage.

He himself dates his prophecy to the time of Josiah, the reformer king of Judah (640 – 609 B.C.). We date the book to somewhere between 635-628 B.C.

Background and Setting:

Josiah was the 16th king to sit on Judah’s throne. His great grandfather was the righteous King Hezekiah (perhaps making him a relative to Zephaniah). Under Hezekiah a religious reformation had come to Judah. God’s laws had been restored and many spiritual and religious reforms took place in the land. However, when Hezekiah died, so did his reforms.

He was succeeded by his son Manasseh, who ended up being one of the most wicked kings to ever sit upon the throne. He reversed all of the reforms his righteous father had enacted in Judah. Manasseh would rule for 40 years, and at the end of his life, he would repent of his wickedness and turn to God. However, his wicked influence would scar Judah and Jerusalem for years. Zephaniah would preach against many of the practices that Manasseh was responsible for introducing to God’s people.

His son Amon succeeded him but only ruled for two years. After his death, he was succeeded by his eight year old son, Josiah. In spite of an evil father and grandfather, Josiah eventually determined to choose the path that his godly great grandfather Hezekiah had chosen. He began to slowly effect a series of religious reforms to rid the land of idols and restore a pure worship to Judah. In 628 B. C. he tore down all the altars to Baal in the land and burned the bones of all the false prophets. In 622 B.C. a priest repairing the temple discovered a long lost book of the law and brought it to Josiah. After reading the law, Josiah launched a serious national effort to seek the Lord and to purify the land.

It was during this period of time shortly, before the national religious reforms were enacted, that Zephaniah preached his message to the nation. There were those in Judah who were still practicing the worship of pagan deities on the rooftops of their homes since their high places had been torn down. Others were compromising by worshiping and honoring Jehovah alongside the pagan gods. Still others were convinced that God was not going to do anything at all – He would do neither good nor evil since He simply did not care one way or the other (1:12).

Clearly this was a time when God's people were trying to serve two masters; they were halting (limping) between two ways – seeking God and serving Him alone or adopting the syncretistic religious practice of Jehovah and pagan gods. Zephaniah denounces this approach and presents a compelling case for repentance – The Day of the Lord's Wrath is fast approaching! Decide who you will serve; seek the Lord while He may yet be found!

Theological Themes:

Zephaniah's main theological concern is that of "The Day of Yahweh." In his prophecy he announces its coming, he gives a graphic description of that day, and then issues an invitation to seek the Lord before He sends out that day.

The Day of the Lord concept is difficult for some readers to comprehend. In its most basic sense, the Day of the Lord is the Lord's day. It is not a reference to Sunday nor is it limited to a 24-hour period of time. ***Rather, the Lord's Day refers to a period of time where God is unusually, clearly, powerfully, and specifically at work in the affairs of men fulfilling His promises for either righteous judgment and vindication (wrath) or faithful restoration (mercy and loving kindness).*** Even though God is always at work in His world, this is a time when He clearly becomes visible as the One directing and controlling events and bringing about His purpose. It is a time when "Yahweh lays bare His arm" and reveals His power before the watching world!

The phrase "Day of the Lord" occurs 19 times in the OT and is primarily found in the prophetic literature. It occurs in at least four major NT passages outside the book of Revelation (Acts 2:20; I Thess. 5:2; II Thess. 2:2; and II Peter 3:10). Generally speaking, although mercy and blessing will accompany certain aspects of the Lord's Day, the primary focus of this Day will be Yahweh's righteous vindication through the expression of His wrath upon wicked and rebellious men.

1. Character of the Day of the Lord
 - a. It is a specific time when God will come to judge the world in righteousness and wrath (Ps. 9:8; 96:13; 98:9)
 - b. On that day, the Lord will become King over the whole earth, and His name will be the only one (Zech. 14:9).
 - c. That day is always pending; it is near, because it has both a near and a distant aspect combined that is often combined in one prophetic perspective (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obadiah 15; Isa. 13:6; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Ezek. 7:7; 30:3).
 - d. It is the time of God's wrath against the wicked (Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2:2, 3; Jer. 4:8; 12:13; Ezek. 7:3, 8, 12, 14, 19).
 - e. It is a day of cosmic gloom and darkness (Amos 5:18; 8:9; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; Zeph. 1:15; Isa. 13:10).
 - f. It is a day of unprecedented battle when the Lord Himself enters as a warrior (Zeph. 1:14; 3:17; Jer. 20:11; Ezek. 30:4-5; Zech. 12:2-3).

2. Common Descriptions of the Day of the Lord
 - a. “Day of clouds and thick Darkness” (Zeph. 1:15; Ezek. 34:12; Joel 2:2).
 - b. “Day of Trouble” (Nahum 1:7; Hab. 3:16; Zeph. 1:15; Jer. 16:19; Obad. 12, 14; Zech. 10:11)
 - c. “Day of Vengeance” (Isa. 34:8; 63:4; Jer. 46:10)
3. Blessings of the Day of the Lord
 - a. Protection of Jerusalem (Zech 12:1)
 - b. Purification of Levi and Priests (Mal. 3:2)
 - c. Cleansing (Zech. 13:1)
 - d. Endowment of the Spirit (Zech. 12:10; Joel 2:28-29)
 - e. Paradise-like conditions for Jerusalem (Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8)
4. Past or “Near” Fulfillments which serve as either an aspect or a type of the Day of the Lord
 - a. The Assyrian deportment of Israel in 722 B.C. (Amos 5:18, 20)
 - b. The Assyrian invasion of Judah in 710 B.C. (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11)
 - c. The Babylonian exile of Judah in 586 B.C. (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:6; Zeph. 1:7; Ezek. 13:5)
 - d. The Babylonian defeat of Egypt around 586 B.C. (Ezek. 30:3)
 - e. The demise of Edom (Obad. 1-14)

Zephaniah specifically describes the effects this coming Day will have on the inhabitants of the world:

1. Emotionally – it will be a “*day of trouble and distress*”
2. Physically – it will be “*a day of devastation and desolation*”
3. Psychologically – it will be “*a day of darkness and gloominess*”
4. Cosmically – it will be “*a day of clouds and thick darkness*”
5. Militarily – it will be “*a day of trumpet and alarm*”

God’s judgment on His day will exceed anything that the world has ever imagined or experienced before! The Lord is angry with the wicked every day, but on that day He will manifest just how angry He really is against sin! No wonder Zephaniah so urgently exhorted the people of Judah to seek the Lord before He sent this day upon them!

Zephaniah’s Message

This ancient prophet has very relevant truth for God’s complacent people today. Like OT Israel, many modern believers have become convinced that God will not really act for or against them; they have become content to live with the status quo of their

spiritual lives. Relatively unconcerned about their wickedness and ungodliness, they believe themselves to be safe from any Divine displeasure.

To such people, Zephaniah boldly makes two shocking and arresting statements. First, God's day of wrath is coming upon you. Second, seek the Lord before the coming of this great and terrible Day of wrath!

I. The Announcement of God's Day of Coming Wrath (1:1 –18)

Zephaniah minces no words as he delivers the warning of God's impending wrath. He jumps right in and announces the hard truth that God has called him to preach to the people. That truth is simply this – God will not wink at sin, especially not the sin of people who call themselves by His name.

They may dwell in self-deceived security, but God is not complacent. He is sending a time of wrath upon them that no wicked one will escape. This time of God's wrath is called "The Day of the Lord," and it will be a time when He is uniquely and openly at work vindicating His name and bringing judgment upon wicked acts and men.

Zephaniah goes on to describe what this unique and terrible day will be like in a series of descriptions.

A. *It will be a Day of Universal Judgment (1:2-3)*

Zephaniah minces no words when he announces God's plan. God is planning a Day of Wrath where He will literally consume and destroy all things and all men from off the face of the earth.

Two key words occur in God's opening speech that indicates what this day will be like:

1. I will consume
2. I will cut off

Nothing will escape God's awesome wrath. It will be as it was in the days of Noah; it will be universal in nature.

This announcement was shocking in nature. Not since the days of Noah had such a judgment been uttered against mankind!

B. *It will be a Day of Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-6)*

As shocking as the announcement that a universal judgment was coming upon the world, even more shocking was the fact that God

announced that He was going to specifically focus this judgment on His people in Jerusalem.

The origin of this judgment would be God Himself; He would “stretch out His hand against Judah and Jerusalem” (1:4).

The basic reason for His fierce wrath is that His people have not sought the Lord (1:6). Three times in this book Zephaniah is going to urge the people to “seek the Lord” (2:3).

One of the basic problems highlighted by the Lord is that His people called upon His name, but they also depended on (called upon) the names of pagan idols as well (1:5). Rather than seek the Lord alone, they had given their loyalty to false gods!

Because God’s people have not sought the Lord but have stretched out their hands to false gods and pagan idols, God is going to seek them out in wrath. He is going to stretch out His arm against them, and He will cut them off!

C. *It will be a Day that will Call for Silence (1:7)*

The Lord instructs all men to be silent before Him. His decision has been made. There are no more excuses to be offered or reasons to be presented. God’s Day of Wrath is at hand!

The expression “at hand” indicates that the day was fast approaching; the time for grace was over! The Lord goes on to present a gruesome picture of what was in store for Jerusalem.

He had prepared a sacrifice and had invited guests to come. However, the sacrifice He had prepared was His own people in Jerusalem. The “guests” would come to slay the sacrifice! The invitation had already been sent, and the guests were on their way. Jerusalem was about to be sacrificed! Rather than argue against God, Zephaniah exhorts men to “hide in Yahweh” – to seek Him before that day comes.

D. *It will be a Day of Judgment on God’s People (1:8-13)*

The Lord goes on to describe the extent of the judgment He was going to bring upon Jerusalem on that great day of “His sacrifice” (1:8).

To show the extensive and thorough nature of the judgment, God first identifies the classes of people that will be judged and then the sections of the city that would be judged.

1. *Judgment would come on all classes of people in Jerusalem.*

2. *Judgment would come upon all sections and sinners in the city of Jerusalem (1:12-13).*

E. *It will be a Day of Judgment on the World (1:14-18)*

Zephaniah goes on to describe the day of the Lord in graphic and shocking terms. He uses five pairs of descriptive terms to describe the effects that this day will have upon men.

1. Emotionally, it will be a day of trouble and distress
2. Physically, it will be a day of devastation and desolation
3. Psychologically, it will be a day of darkness and gloominess
4. Cosmically, it will be a day of clouds and thick darkness
5. Militarily, it will be a day of trumpet and alarm

Zephaniah makes it clear that God has announced the coming of His Day. This Day of the Lord will be one of wrath and judgment. Its coming is sure. Nothing could be done to save the nation of Judah now. Grace had been exhausted, and all that now remained was God's righteous wrath on an unrepentant nation that had "sinned against the Lord" (1:17).

II. *The Invitation to Seek the Lord (2:1 – 3:20)*

Seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger (2:3).

The heart of Zephaniah's message is expressed in the invitation that he extends to God's people. His passion and urgency are evident in the expressions he uses to urge the people to "seek the Lord."

A. *The Exhortation to Seek the Lord (2:1-3)*

Zephaniah calls this nation an undesirable people – literally a people who had no shame – shameless! Their sin and idolatry had made them undesirable and full of shameful activity. There was no wickedness that was too wicked for them!

This nation was given one last exhortation. They are encouraged to gather together as a nation for the purpose of seeking the Lord. In this context the idea here is of turning to God in national repentance.

They are to seek three specific things in turning to the Lord. They are to ardently pursue Him and not their idols. They were to ardently pursue God's righteous standards in their ethical behavior with others.

They were to ardently and intentionally seek to submit themselves and their will to His law and desires.

If they were to reject idols, seek justice, and seek humility, then *perhaps* God would be merciful and “hide” them in the day of His wrath!

B. The Extermination of Those Who Refused to Seek the Lord (2:4 – 3:8)

To help God’s people make their decision. Zephaniah recounts again God’s judgment upon the world and upon their city in more specific detail. God’s specific intention in demonstrating His wrath in judging the nations was to produce repentance in the hearts of His people (3:6-7).

I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; there is no one, no inhabitant. I said, Surely you will fear Me, you will receive instruction – so that her dwelling would not be cut off, despite everything for which I have punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.

However this intended result did not come about. So ingrained was the rebellion of Judah that not even repeated demonstrations of God’s judgment on the nations around her could keep her from repeating the very sins for which these nations had been judged!

1. Judgment upon the Nations of the World (2:4-15)

In this section, Zephaniah selects four nations – one from each point on the compass – and describes in detail the judgment that God is going to bring against them for their sins. The reason for this detailed account is to motivate Judah to repent when she sees what God will bring upon the surrounding nations for their sins, the very sins with which Judah has corrupted herself.

2. Judgment upon Jerusalem (3:1-8)

Now Zephaniah focuses attention on what God would do to those in Jerusalem who refused to repent and seek the Lord. They would fall under the devastating judgment that God would send upon them as well as upon the nations that were previously listed.

a. The Description of the City

Zephaniah uses three participles here to describe the condition of Jerusalem for which she stands condemned. She is “rebellious,” “polluted,” and “oppressing.”

b. The Denouncement of the City (3:2)

Because of her defilement, she stands culpable before God. Zephaniah lists four specific charges against her.

First, she will not obey the voice of God.

Second, she would not receive correction.

Third, she did not trust Yahweh in times of trouble or crisis.

Finally, she did not draw near to God.

c. The Declaration against the Citizens (3:3-5)

What follows is a specific list of indictments against every segment of society.

In contrast to their wicked ways, God has constantly been righteous in their midst. Each morning with the sacrifice at the temple the people were reminded that God was holy and His law was just.

d. The Decision against the City (3:6-8)

God now addresses His people. He had judged the other nations before them in order to teach them His ways and to bring them to repentance. However, instead of repenting, they rose up against God and eagerly corrupted all of their deeds. Now, God would rise up against them!

As they rose up early (eagerly) to pursue wickedness, God would rise up and pursue justice. He would gather all the nations of the world together and pour out His righteous indignation upon them all.

C. The Exaltation of The Remnant Who Sought the Lord (3:9-20)

The fire of God’s wrath and judgment must fall upon His people (and it did in 586 B.C.). However, this would not be the end of the story. Zephaniah describes the wonderful exaltation that awaits the repentant

nation of Israel in that great Day of the Lord! In that Day, not only will He show His wrath against sin; the Lord will also show His power and faithfulness on behalf of His people. He will remake them into a holy nation dedicated unto Himself!

1. He will Convert the Nations (3:9-10)

After that Day, God will purge the earth and will convert all the nations so that they will all call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him with together with one heart!

2. He will Consecrate the Righteous Remnant (3:11-13)

In that Day, God will preserve and purify His people. So complete will be their cleansing this nation that was called undesirable or shameless in Zephaniah's day would have their shame removed (3:11).

3. He will Rejoice in His Righteous People (3:14-17)

This nation that had been such an offense to God would now be His prized possession. They who had been the cause of His wrath upon them would now be the cause for His rejoicing over them!

4. He will Restore the Fortunes of His Righteous People (3:18-20)

All that had been taken away in judgment and wrath, God would now restore and more beside! He would deal with those who had afflicted His people (3:19). He would save and gather the outcast and downtrodden (3:19). He would make this nation to be praised and honored by all on the earth (3:19).

Conclusion:

The great transformation of this nation and restoration described here would be done before the very eyes of the nation hearing this prophecy 3:20. Few, if any, of Zephaniah's generation would live to see the restoration from Babylon. None of them would live to see the transformation from the nation before them to the spiritual and national nation described here.

In the resurrection, however, all of God's people will see the fulfillment of all the promises that God has made here!

Terrible is the Day of the Lord for those who rebel against Him. Great is the Day of the Lord for those who love Him! No wonder Zephaniah was so urgent in his

exhortation – seek the Lord while He may be found. He will hide you in the day of His wrath!

Excursus on the Day of the Lord

The phrase, “Day of the Lord”, is used by 8 OT writers in over 19 different places.

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Obad. 15 | 6. Joel 3:14 | 11. Isa. 13:6 | 16. Ezek 13:5 |
| 2. Joel 1:15 | 7. Amos 5:18 | 12. Isa. 13:9 | 17. Ezek. 30:3 |
| 3. Joel 2:1 | 8. Amos 5:18b | 13. Zeph 1:7 | 18. Zech. 14:1 |
| 4. Joel 2:31 | 9. Amos 5:20 | 14. Zeph 1:14 | 19. Mal. 4:5 |
| 5. Joel 2:31 | 10. Is 2:12 | 15. Zeph 1:14b | |

The phrase occurs 4 times in the NT

1. Acts 2:20 2. I Thess 5:2 3. II Thess 2:2 4. II Peter 3:10

Definition and Description

The Day of the Lord is a specific time when God intervenes directly in the affairs of men either for judgment or for blessing.

Note the following conclusions we can draw about this unique Day.

1. It is not primarily referring to a chronological time period but rather to the nature or character of the period.
2. This period is identified as belonging to the Lord; it is His exclusive day.
3. In this day, God’s character is revealed in an unusually definitive way. He is seen as mighty and powerful and holy. This revelation brings terror and fear to His enemies and rejoicing to His people.
4. There are times where the primary emphasis is on the terrible side of this term on God’s righteous wrath and the devastating power of His judgment.
 - a. Earthquakes and shaking of earth (Joel 2:1-11; 2:31; 3:16)
 - b. Violent weather (Ezek 13:5)
 - c. Clouds and deep darkness (Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:7)
 - d. Cosmic upheaval (Joel 2:3, 30)
 - e. A great and terrible day of destruction from God (Joel 2:11; 1:15)

5. There are times where the primary emphasis on the blessing and restoration of Israel is in view; the day is seen in terms of promise and hope
 - a. There will be a pouring out of the Spirit accompanied by prophetic utterances, dreams, and visions (Joel 2:28, 29).
 - b. The coming of Elijah is seen as a part of this particular aspect of the day (Mal 4:5-6).
 - c. Physical blessing, fruitfulness, and prosperity in the land will follow the coming of this day (Joel 2:21ff.; 3:16-21).

Theological Use of Term

It is clear that the prophets had two primary things in mind when using this term. They used it in several distinct ways:

1. To depict the near or impending judgment of God coming upon a nation.
(Is. 13:6-22; Ezek. 30:2-19; Joel 1:15; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18)
2. To depict the far-off eschatological time of judgment and blessing.
(Joel 2:30-32; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:1, 5)
3. They used it to depict judgment on Israel (Judah and Israel) as well as on other nations (Edom).
4. Six times it is described as a Day of Doom and four times as a day of vengeance.
5. Its final phase will be at the end of the tribulation period (Rev. 19:11-21) and again at the end of the millennium (II Peter 3:10; Rev. 20:7-15).
6. Sometimes the Day of the Lord came with great fanfare and warning as in the OT warnings to Israel, Judah, and Edom. Sometimes the Day of the Lord would come suddenly like a thief in the night.

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Haggai
“What are Your Priorities?”

Introduction

Decision-making is a fundamental part of daily life. The process of decision making involves choosing one option over another. Most often we choose the option that is most valuable or most advantageous to us. In this way, we reveal what is important to us.

As Christians, our daily decisions often reveal that our real priorities are very different than our verbal or “claimed” priorities. We may claim that the Lord and His work is first in our lives, but the real test of that claim comes in what our decisions reveal to be the real priorities of our lives.

A priority has been defined as a necessity that can’t be ignored. It may bring difficulty or hardship, but it functions as a driving force that controls our thinking, acting, and choosing.

Any successful endeavor involves setting goals or purposes and then determining what steps must be taken and what choices must be made in order to accomplish that mission. Those choices become priorities. A person who does not prioritize and choose accordingly is not likely to succeed in accomplishing the endeavor he set out to do.

For the Christian, God has set an agenda – He has established His work as our mission. We often fail to accomplish His work because we fail to make daily choices that line up and advance His priorities. In short, our priorities are not set or directed toward the work of God. Along the way, God will allow someone or something to enter into our lives to get our attention and alert us that our priorities are not lined up with His purpose.

This is not a new problem. God’s people in every age have always struggled with the issue of making God’s work and God’s agenda their priority. Such was the case with a group of Jews who had recently returned to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding their temple. Somewhere along the way, they got distracted and lost sight of the goal. Other things became more important and soon the work had ceased all together. God sent a prophet named Haggai to challenge the people. He had one simple question, “Consider your ways. Where are your priorities?”

Title:

The book of Haggai bears the name of the prophet who preached the four oracles contained therein. Haggai means “*festive*” or “*festal*”, and some have suggested that he may have been born on one of Israel’s feast days.

Author and Date

Not much is known about Haggai. Some have inferred from his statement in 2:3 that he was alive when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, so he would have seen Solomon’s temple in all of its glory. If this is the case, then Haggai would have been almost 80 years of age when he preached these messages to Judah. Jewish tradition is that he spent most of his life in Babylon during the captivity. One additional clue to his background may be inferred from his familiarity with priestly ritual (2:10-14). Some have argued that his familiarity with the finer points of Levitical law indicate that he may have been from the priestly lineage.

The date of each of Haggai’s five sermons is specifically recorded in his prophecy. From the information recorded in the book, Haggai preached these sermons on four separate occasions during a four-month period of time in the year 520 B.C. during the reign of the Persian monarch Darius Hystaspes (521 – 486 B.C.).

Background and Setting

The destruction of Jerusalem that so many of the OT prophets had predicted had finally come to pass in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar’s armies had launched a three-stage offensive against Jerusalem, culminating with the destruction of the city walls and the burning of the temple. Most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were deported to Babylon, where they would be in captivity that God had declared would last for 70 years. However, God had also promised to restore His people after the captivity was over. As the end of the period of captivity began to draw to a close, God began orchestrating events that were designed to fulfill in part the promises that He had made to His people.

1. The Fall of Babylon to the Persians --(539 B.C.)

2. The Edict of Cyrus the Great (539 -- 530 B.C.)

Cyrus the Great would rule over the Persian Empire for almost 10 years. He determined to gain the loyalty of those who had been captured and deported by the Babylonians by permitting them to return to their homelands – this would make for good politics as well as loyal citizens.

One group that fell into this category were the Jews who had been deported from Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus issued an edict allowing them to return to Judea and rebuild their city and their temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The record of this important edict is preserved in its official Aramaic form in Ezra 6:3-5. Its more popular version can be read in Ezra 1:2-4.

Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem with a disappointingly small group of about 50,000 Jews in 538 or 537 B.C. Sadly, many of the deported Jews had grown comfortable with life in Babylon and determined not to return to their once beloved city.

The first order of the day consisted of rebuilding the altar on the site of Solomon's temple so that sacrifices could again be offered. As soon as they had made arrangements for their families, they began the work of clearing away the rubble and relaying the foundation for the temple they intended to rebuild.

However, it wasn't long before opposition to the project surfaced from people who lived in the surrounding area. The builders soon became discouraged, and work on the temple slowed down and then came to a stop altogether. Fifteen years would pass and still not one stone was set upon the foundation; it appeared that the dream of a temple had vanished.

3. *The Preaching of Haggai and Zechariah – (520 B.C.)*

Then, in 520 B.C. an ancient prophet named Haggai arrived on the scene at Jerusalem accompanied by a younger prophet named Zechariah. Haggai preached a scathing message to the people followed by four more sermons within a 4-month period of time. In response to his penetrating rebuke, the people rose up to work and soon work on the temple resumed. Five years later, in March of 515 B.C., the temple would be complete!

Structure and Outline:

The book of Haggai consists of two chapters in our English Bibles. The 38 verses that make up these two chapters actually contain five separate sermons that Haggai preached on four distinct occasions. These sermons give the natural divisions and organizational scheme of the book.

The Structure of Haggai			
A Call To Action	A Call To Courage	A Call To Patience	A Call To Hope
Reproof	Encouragement	Blessing	Promises
Chapter 1	Chapter 2:1-9	Chapter 2:10-19	Chapter 2:20-23

Haggai's Messages:

The five sections (sermons) of Haggai can be best divided into four main messages:

Note: The second message (1:12-15) is a brief affirmation of God's pleasure and promised presence at the obedience of Zerubbabel and the people to Haggai's first message. As such, it will be included in this lecture in the discussion of Haggai's first message or oracle.

I. A Call to Renew the Work of God (1:1-15)

A challenge to our unwarranted contentment

Often this chapter of Haggai is read when a building project is not progressing and the saints need a not-so-subtle reminder that they need to get back to the business at hand! However, this chapter is not just about temple building. It is about the temple but it isn't! The temple that needed rebuilding in Haggai's day was just a metaphor for the larger issue at hand – the work of God itself!

Any work of God to which He calls His people must become a priority above their own agenda. Sadly, often we become ensnared by the cares and “stuff” of life, and the work of God eventually is set aside in the busyness of life!

God in His grace and mercy will often send someone to “shake us” out of lethargy and remind us that we need to renew our commitment to God's work rather than to our own.

Haggai presented four ways by which the Jews of his day could renew the work of God – they are just as valid for our day.

A. Renew God's Work by Refusing to Offer Excuses (1:1-2)

God's displeasure with His people is evidenced by the terms He uses to address them. Instead of addressing them with the expected “My people” He calls them “this people” (1:2). The severity and seriousness of His displeasure is further revealed in that He identifies Himself by His going-to-war name – “the Lord of Hosts.

He is angry with Judah because they have not done what He desired them to do – they had abandoned the work of rebuilding His temple. It had been 15 years since the last work had been done on the foundation and not one brick had been laid for the temple.

The people excused their inactivity by observing that “the time had not come” for the building of the temple. This is a nice way of saying, this is not a convenient time to build this project. We are going to wait until God brings about a better time or better circumstances.

There was too much rubble; the project was too immense; there was the danger of opposition – the excuses went on and on! The time was never right for the people to dedicate themselves to God’s work.

God’s people in our day have abandoned God’s work because “the time is not right”. We must reject our excuses for what they are: “the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie!” We must put aside our excuses, stop waiting for a more convenient time, and recommit to renewing the work of God in our day! There is no better or more convenient time to obey God than the present – Right Now!

B. Renew God’s Work by Adjusting Our Priorities (1:3-6)

Strangely enough, there was plenty of time and opportunity for them to accomplish their own work! While there was no convenient time to build God’s house many of them had found time to build their own elaborate homes. God comes in their midst and challenges them to “Consider their Ways” – in other words, “Adjust your priorities!”

1. Our priorities need adjusting when our work is more important to us than God’s work!

God’s people had no time for the temple but they had time and energy for their own burdens. They built elaborate homes and probably even used the materials that had been originally gathered for the construction of the Temple (1:4).

God sent a strong message to those who put their work ahead of God’s work – Consider your ways! (1:5)

2. Our priorities need adjusting when our ways are more right in our eyes than God’s ways! (1:6-7)

The people were convinced that their way was best – so God gave them a brief reminder of what their way had really produced. They ate more and were less filled. They planted more and harvested less. They worked more and earned less. All they did to accomplish more ended up producing less!

This was not just the fortunes of circumstance, climate, or economy. God was divinely frustrating all their efforts (1:9).

Again God instructs His people to consider their ways!

C. Renew God’s Work by Participating Obediently (1:8-12)

Haggai preached to the people and announced that God wanted them to respond to His instruction to consider their ways. He wanted them to renew His work by obeying Him and immediately adjusting their priorities to participate in His work!

1. *The Purpose of Obedience*

God instructs the people to drop what they are doing and head to the mountains to get wood for the temple. Perhaps all the materials had been stolen or ruined during the 15 years of inactivity. Now they were to go and find materials and build the temple. In short, God commanded them to get busy and build My temple! (1:8)

However, God is not just wanting them to obey because He wants a building. His ultimate goal is to take pleasure in His work and to be glorified!

This is the real purpose for our obedience, we do not obey because God wants or needs anything. We obey because it pleases God and it glorifies Him!

2. *The Cost of Disobedience (1:9-11)*

Often putting God's work ahead of ours is costly. This is generally why God's people get their priorities out of line. However, God reminds this nation that the cost of disobedience is even greater than the inconvenience of putting His work ahead of their work! In short, there is a high cost to low living. Disobedience is never a short cut to success and prosperity – spiritually or otherwise. Ultimately, it is a very costly road to travel, and it never leads you to your desired destination.

God reveals that when His people live disobediently, He sets Himself against them! Since they had abandoned His work, He would abandon theirs. Since His house lay in ruins, He would see that their land and their efforts would come to ruin. Their lands, crops, and endeavors would be as untouched by His blessing as His temple had been by their hands.

Since they had “blown off” His temple, He would blow on their efforts and scatter to the winds what little they brought home! God has a very powerful way of getting the attention of a disobedient people.

3. *The Result of Obedience (1:12)*

Haggai records a very beautiful and wonderful response to his preaching. Zerubbabel and the people repented and put their hand to the work and obeyed the voice of the Lord!

Haggai goes on to reveal that this obedience caused Zerubbabel and the people to fear the presence of the Lord. Far from being a negative coerced fear – this is the reverential loving fear of God.

The people began to grow in their love for God's presence! Whereas, before they were satisfied with no temple – now God mattered! They revered Him and loved Him and desired to build a house worthy for Him.

So, one result of obedience is a renewed love for God. Has your love for God grown cold? Do you desire a deeper more intimate relationship? Do you want to experience more of His presence? Then personally participate in obedience!

A second blessing that resulted from obedience is wisdom. When we have a proper fear of God, the scripture teaches this is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord leads us to the wisdom of the Lord. Deuteronomy reveals that this wisdom comes from the mouth of God. When we fear God, we will heed and obey His words. His Word will be the way of wisdom for us!

D. Renew God's Work by Receiving God's Enablement (1:13-15)

When God saw the obedient response of His people, He instructed them to be strong as He had done with Joshua of old. As with both Joshua and Moses before him, the Lord assured Zerubbabel and the nation that they could be strong because He would be with them (1:13).

Then a beautiful thing is recorded – God stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel; God stirred up the heart of Joshua the high priest; and God stirred the spirit of the people as a whole – and when this happened, they came and worked on the house of the Lord! (1:14).

When God stirs the heart of His people for His work, they come with passionate loving hearts prepared to put their hand to the task so that the work of the Lord may be accomplished! May it be so in us!

II. A Call to Reject a Negative Spirit -- Be Courageous (2:1-9)

A challenge to our unwarranted discouragement

God's people in Haggai's day were no different than His people today. Like us, they were susceptible to discouragement and disillusionment in the midst of obeying God's work. As the work began to proceed on the temple, it soon became clear that this temple would not even come close to the beauty of the former temple. It would be a much smaller and less magnificent structure.

Soon the people began to compare what they were doing to the former temple, and they grew discouraged and disillusioned. How often we grow discouraged when we reflect on God's glorious work in the past and compare our present meager efforts for Him. Soon the work of God is in real danger. God addressed this danger by instructing His people to be courageous and to reject a negative critical spirit. There is nothing more devastating to God's work, no matter when or where, than workers who have a negative and critical or comparing attitude.

God instructed Zerubbabel to guard against a negative spirit and to combat discouragement by doing the following:

A. By Seeing God's Perspective (2:1-3)

This temple might seem small and insignificant in their eyes, but God had bigger plans for this little temple than He ever had for the former one! In this temple, He would make peace for all the world! This little temple would actually receive His promised Messiah one day!

B. By Receiving God's Power and Presence (2:4-5)

As the work dragged on, the workers grew tired and discouraged; God exhorted Zerubbabel to be strong! He was to do the work not in his strength nor in the strength of the people but in the strength provided by God Himself.

David had encouraged Solomon to be strong and of good courage when he faced the monumental task of building the first temple (1 Chron. 28:10, 20). Now God gives the same exhortation to another son of David who was building this new temple.

God would be with them, and His Spirit would continually (perfect tense) abide with them (2:5). As a result, they could work with all fears alleviated and all strength provided!

C. By Believing God's Promise (2:6-9)

What comes next is an unbelievable demonstration of God's grace to weak and discouraged people who were doing their best to obey Him and participate in His work. This little band of people, so insignificant in the eyes of the people around them, was invited into the very counsel chambers of God where He revealed to them His plans for the future!

He would again shake the earth. There would be a minor tremor in the near future when Persia was defeated by Alexander the Great and the Grecian armies. However, this shaking would come at the end of the age when Messiah (here the "desire of all nations is probably a reference to a person – Christ at His second coming – rather than a place, Jerusalem) and fill up this little temple with His glory! There in that temple God would make peace (this part of the promise is most likely a reference to Christ's first advent).

So, with God's purpose made known, His presence and power made available, and His promises made sure, how can I fear when He is near!

III. A Call To Personal Holiness (2:10-19)

A challenge to guard against misplaced values

In the midst of the project, God addresses His people yet again and instructs them to carefully consider their past error (2:15). He specifically takes them back to the days before the work had resumed and the first stone had been laid and gives them an object lesson to help them guard against making the same mistake of misplaced values that had been true of them in those days.

God begins by instructing them to ask the priests two questions related to holiness. The answers are as expected. He then applies the principles to their offerings and sacrifices before they renewed the work on the temple.

They believed that their sacrifices and offerings were acceptable to God, but in those days they had been unclean before God and their uncleanness had defiled every thing they touched, every work they did for God, and every sacrifice they attempted for Him! No wonder nothing they did prospered!

God was doing this to help them understand that the real problem was not their failure to build the temple. The real problem was their uncleanness and lack of personal holiness that came about as a result of their lack of concern for God.

People who don't care about God and are not concerned with pleasing Him are not likely to remain holy for very long. As we pursue our agenda, we drift away from what pleases God and soon find ourselves unclean!

Note: God's Explanation in His words

God came to visit His people and stopped the work so that He could address them and teach them an important lesson. He asked them to consider two questions of the priests. If an edge of a garment carrying holy meat touches some other unconsecrated food, does that make the unconsecrated food holy? Answer – No. Do these same foods become unclean if they are touched by someone who touched a dead body? Answer – yes!

Now, I want you to consider well the application. I want you to go back to before you put the first brick down on this project – go back to the 15 years before you returned to My work and let Me tell you about your offerings on the altar that was here. Those holy offerings and sacrifices did not make you clean in My sight! Why? Because those offerings could not impart holiness to you – Holiness is not contagious! In fact, those offerings were defiled and unclean in My sight. Why? Because you were unclean, and you touched them! Uncleanness is contagious!

Now, here is the real question. What made you unclean? You did not pursue idolatry as did your fathers. You did not engage in immorality and violence as did your fathers. So what made you unclean? Fifteen years of doing your own thing and making your work more important than My work. At the heart of Holiness is being separated/dedicated unto Me! I should have been your heart's desire! You should have been running after Me in your hearts – instead you were busy running after your own way. Proof? You never even lifted a finger to build My house, and yet you found time to build elaborate houses for yourselves. As a result of not being dedicated/apart to Me and for My work, you became unclean.

Remember before you repented and returned to build the temple? You would go to get grain and instead of getting the 20 ephahs you expected, there was only 10. Instead of 50 baths of wine, there was only 20. Remember those days? Here was the real problem – you would not turn to Me!

It never was about putting bricks up on this site and building Me a temple. It was always about the direction and focus of your heart. Your lack of desire for My temple was only an indication that you had turned away from me – and that made you unclean even though externally you were doing all the right things.

Now, don't think that simply building this temple will keep you clean! The only thing that will keep you clean is when you continue to seek and serve Me

with your whole heart. Consider your ways carefully. From this day on, I will bless you! (2:19)

Here are the three conclusions that God wanted His people to draw from His object lesson!

A. *Holiness is not contagious – evil is! (2:10-13)*

Two illustrations are drawn from OT Levitical law (Lev 2:27).

Food touched by a garment carrying consecrated meat did not become consecrated. That same food however would become unclean if it was touched by someone who was unclean.

B. *Holy works do not make holy people (2:14)*

Two applications are drawn from the illustration.

First, this nation is unclean, and the offerings and holy sacrifices are powerless to make them clean since their heart is turned from Me. Second, their sacrifices and offerings have become defiled because they have been handled and offered by unclean people.

C. *Attention to holiness is the only path to blessing (2:15-19)*

IV. A Call to Participate in God's Triumph (2:20-23)

A reminder to live for the right world

Two sermons on the same day! This is exactly what happened to God's people on December 18, 520 B.C. In this final message, Haggai announces for the second time that one day in the future, God will shake the world – everything they know will be overthrown and cast down by God.

However, this same God would take them and make them to be His special signet ring. This ring was a symbol of favor, honor, and authority. This was what Pharaoh gave Joseph to show him honor and give him authority before the people. God would take David's dynasty represented here by Zerubbabel and so honor them in the eyes of the nations. They would be the objects of God's special favor and would be appointed by Him to rule with Him over the world.

In light of God's future plans, what are His people to do in the mean time?

A. *Loosely Hold the Perishable Things of Life (2:20 – 21)*

B. *Strive to Firmly Grasp the Unmovable Kingdom of God (2:22-23)*

Conclusion:

Don't live for the dash on your tombstone! Live for the real world, not the temporal one!

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Zechariah
“What are God’s Purposes – What is He up to?”

Introduction:

Often as the events of life unfold, one is increasingly tempted to wonder if there is any rhyme or reason for what happens. For the Christian, theology instructs us that even the most insignificant of events is part of God’s over-arching plan and as such, is under His sovereign control.

As wonderful as this theological truth is, it is often lost in the immediate struggle of daily life as those events unfold. It is very difficult to keep the bigger picture in mind. This is true in all areas and spectrums of life. Often little children don’t understand why they have to do certain things at the present moment which are necessary for their success later on in life. Their wise parents have orchestrated these events in light of a much bigger picture. Illustrating this from another vantage point, every good general or commanding officer has a much bigger picture in mind by which he arranges and moves and orchestrates his troops. On the front line, the private who is being moved around and must face the nitty-gritty muck and mire of the warfare may not immediately understand why he is where he is doing what he has been given to do. Like the child in our first illustration, he lacks the bigger picture and is often prone to becoming frustrated and disillusioned with the hardships associated with his present situation.

Part of the job of every good parent and every good military leader is to help those under their authority to see the big picture. From time to time they must take the time to help these subordinate individuals see and understand what is really going on and how the specific activities they are presently engaged in, hard as they may be, play a role in accomplishing a much bigger objective. Although, they may not fully understand the larger picture, having the larger picture serves to motivate them and to focus them on the task at hand.

God at times does this with His children. Such an occasion is seen in the lives of His people, Judah, who have recently returned to their land after a lengthy period of captivity. Not many have elected to return and rebuild. Those who have returned have grown disillusioned with the tasks, the difficulties, and the opposition that has come their way. Two other prophets have urged them to continue the task, Haggai and Zephaniah. Now God sends another prophet, Zechariah, to encourage them by helping them see the bigger picture that He has in mind for them and for their nation. The temple they are building is for a great future day!

In short, Zechariah is sent to God's people to help them understand what God is up to, what He is doing in their midst. When God's purposes are understood by His people, the vision He has for them brings strength and humble submission.

Title:

The book bears the name of the prophet associated with the prophecy – Zechariah. Universal tradition of both OT Jewish Rabbis and NT Christians is that Zechariah gave this prophecy.

His name means “Yahweh remembers,” and his book is second only to Isaiah in the breadth and scope of the material given in an OT book regarding the Messiah. Furthermore, as seen below, Zechariah is second only to Ezekiel in its influence on the NT book of Revelation.

Author and Date:

Author

Over 30 different people in the OT were named Zechariah. This Zechariah was the son of Berechiah and the “grandson” of Iddo the prophet (1:1).

Date:

Chapters 1-8 = 520 B.C. and Chapters 9-14 = 480 - 470 B.C.

Historical Background:

The background of the book is the same as that of Haggai.

Zechariah's message to the people is that God has not forgotten. This is the meaning of his name, and it is the central message of his prophecy. The people were not just rebuilding the temple for the present hour but for the future plans that God was unfolding. God would restore the land and the nation when Messiah would come and inhabit His temple. God would remember!

Structure and Outline:

Simple Overview

1. Chapters 1-6 contain 8 night visions followed by an object lesson of Joshua being crowned as High Priest.

These visions involve prophetic pictures whose applications begin in Zechariah's day and whose ultimate fulfillment will come to pass in some cases at the first and/or second advent of Messiah.

2. Chapters 7-8 have to do with questions related to the practice of fasting among the Jewish nation in Zechariah's day.

God gives a four-part answer to this question that we will examine later, time permitting. For now we will look at the emphasis of each of these two chapters.

- a. The focus of chapter 7 is a negative answer from God and relates primarily to the time of Zechariah.

"I don't care about your fasting; it is an external act on your part. What I do care about is your internal heart attitude."

- b. The focus of chapter 8 is a positive answer from God and primarily relates to the Messianic kingdom.

"During the millennium, fasting will be replaced by feasting. Joy will be present then, and since you have that assurance, why are you fasting now (8:9)?"

3. Chapters 9-14 constitute the apocalyptic message of Messiah's first and second coming.

This latter section of the book clearly moves beyond the present circumstances of Zechariah's day to future events both near and distant.

It focuses on the universal judgments and universal triumphs of God's people.

- a. 9:1-8 refers to the rising of the Greek empire of Alexander the Great and how God used him to exercise judgment on the nations surrounding Israel in Zechariah's day and shortly thereafter. Amazingly, this prophecy was given 200 years before Alexander came on the scene.
- b. 9:9-12 moves on to the arrival of Messiah in His first advent riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt. 21:1-5; John 12:12-16). In this verse (9:9) he is seen as 1] Royal King, 2] Just, 3] Bringing Salvation, 4] humble.

In verses 10 - 12 he moves on to the 2nd advent of Messiah and the establishment of His universal kingdom.

- c. Chapter 10 deals with the restoration of Judah and Israel, and Messiah is presented as their Great and Good Shepherd – King.
- d. Chapter 11 moves from the glories of the 2nd advent backwards in future time to the ugly reality of Judah's rejection of the Messiah at His first advent.
- e. Chapters 12 - 13 move forward to the 2nd advent again and depicts the coming ultimate and final deliverance of Judah. She will be delivered by the second coming of the very One who was pierced by her at His first coming.
- f. Chapter 14 is a fuller amplification and explanation of what is promised in chapter 13. Zechariah depicts the eschatological Day of the Lord which will result in the establishment of the Nation and the inauguration of the millennial kingdom. In chapter 11 Zechariah predicts that the Jews will make an alliance or agreement with a "foolish/false shepherd" (11:15-17) who is actually the anti-Christ. The final battle against this false shepherd is depicted in chapter 14.

Textual Outline

- I. Call to Repentance (1:1-6)
- II. Eight Night Visions of Zechariah (1:7 - 6:15)
 - A. Man among the Myrtle Trees (1:7-17)
 - B. Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (1:18-21)
 - C. Man with a Measuring Line (2:1-13)
 - D. Cleansing of High Priest (3:1-10)
 - E. Gold Lampstand and Two Olive Trees (4:1-14)
 - F. Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
 - G. Woman in Basket (5:5-11)
 - H. Four Chariots (6:1-8)
 - I. Object Lesson – Coronation of Joshua the High Priest (6:9-15)
- III. Four Messages of Zechariah (7:1-8:23)
 - A. Questions about Fasting (7:1-3)
 - B. Four Responses (7:4-8:23)
 - 1. Rebuke for wrong motives (7:4-7)
 - 2. Repentance required (7:8-14)
 - 3. Restoration of favor (8:1-17)
 - 4. Fasts become feasts (8:18-23)
- IV. Two Burdens of Zechariah
 - A. Messiah's Rejection at His First Advent (9:1-11:17)

B. Messiah's Acceptance at His Second Advent (12:1-14:21)

Message of Zechariah:

I. Calling God's People to Repentance (1:1-6)

This section of the prophecy has been called one of the most intense spiritual calls to repentance found in the entire OT.

It consists of 4 specific summons to repentance (or elements of repentance) for all people in all ages.

This call was likely given shortly after Haggai's stirring message to put the rebuilding of God's house as a top priority. Zechariah follows this up with an appeal that this important work be done with the right heart. Haggai wants the people to turn back their hands to building the temple of God. Zechariah wants the people to turn their hearts back to the God of the temple.

A. *We must repent if we wish to experience God's blessing (1:1-3)*

Zechariah starts with the strongest statement he could make. "God has been very angry with your Fathers (1:2)."

It was high time that Judah realized and came to grips that their loving God could not be treated lightly. The repeated sinning of their fathers had finally incited a holy and patient God of love to deep seated righteous anger.

They are exhorted to return to the Lord (turn = repentance) and to avoid being like their fathers who refused God's invitation and rejected His warnings.

If they would return to God, then He would return to them (1:3)

"Lord of Hosts" indicates God's rulership over all the universe and particularly over all armies. It is used 261x in OT and of those times 91x by the prophets. In particular it occurs 14x in Haggai, 24x in Malachi, and 53x in Zechariah.

B. *We must be responsive to the lessons of history if we wish to escape God's destruction (1:4)*

Look to your past history; do not be like your fathers!

Zechariah is urging his generation to reject their evil ways and deeds if they wished to escape a similar fate that befell their fathers.

- a. evil ways – direction or mindset; focus on inner heart
- b. evil deeds – actual practice of evil; focus on

hands/action

C. *We must realize how brief the time and opportunities are if we wish to do anything positive (1:5)*

Where are the fathers? Gone!

What happened to them? The thing that the prophets warned them about happened to them.

Where are the prophets? They are gone as well.

What is the point? The point is simply this: “No one lives for ever; now is the time to obey God.”

D. *We must count on the unchanging Word of God if we wish to do anything that lasts (1:6)*

God’s Word that He commanded His prophets to preach to “the fathers” overtook the Fathers and consumed them!

II. *Eight Night Visions (1:7 - 6:5)*

A. *Purpose of the Visions*

1. Revelation of God’s Future Plans for His People

In these 8 visions, God is going to reveal to Zechariah and to His people what His future plans are for Israel. These visions reveal that God is actively at work in and for His chosen people.

Some of the things that God promises to do in these visions have been fulfilled either fully or partially by the first Advent, but most of what God promised to do in these visions is still future and will be fulfilled at the second advent of Messiah.

2. Comfort and Motivation of His people

God reveals His future plans for His people in order to comfort them and to motivate them to faithfully continue serving Him until He chooses to bring these things to pass. In the case of Zechariah’s audience, in light of these visions, they were to complete the temple and serve the Lord faithfully until Messiah would come.

B. *Structure of the Visions*

The visions are set up in pairs.

1. 1 and 8 go together with the nations being judged and Israel receiving peace.
2. 2 and 3 go together with 2 describing the destruction of Israel's enemies and 3 dealing with the rebuilding of Jerusalem.
3. 4 and 5 go together with 4 dealing with the cleansing of the high priest and the people and 5 dealing with the rebuilt temple for the priest and the people to serve and worship in.
4. 6 and 7 go together with 6 dealing with the flying scroll and the purging of individual sin and 7 dealing with the woman in the basket depicting that sin itself will be contained and then removed to its proper place.

C. *Content and Meaning of the Visions*

Note that each vision consists of:

- i. Statement of the vision
- ii. Question asked about the meaning of the vision
- iii. Interpretation of the vision given

1. *Vision of the Man in the Myrtle trees* – God promises prosperity to Israel (1:7-17).

- a. Content of the Vision:
Man on a red horse in the myrtle trees with 3 different colored horses and riders in the vision
- b. Meaning of Vision
 - 1) The man on the red horse in the myrtle trees is identified as the Angel of the Lord – probably an OT Christophony (1:11).
 - 2) The other riders all answer to Him and are charged with riding to and fro among the earth exercising God's judgment on the nations of the earth. They report to the Angel of the Lord. (Red horse = war; White horse = victory; Sorrel/spotted horse = mixed war and victory). These horses are obviously messengers of God's vengeance and probably refer to angelic hosts as mentioned in Daniel's prophecy. They report that the state of the nations of the earth is one of ease and peace, resting quietly (1:11).
 - 3) The myrtle tree is associated with the Jewish feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-34; Neh 8:15) as well as with messianic blessing (Is. 41:19;

- 55:13) and is probably a reference to the Nation of Israel. The fact that these trees are in a low-lying place probably refers to the fact that at
- 4) The rider is sitting on a red horse indicating He is preparing for war. He intercedes to the Lord of Hosts on behalf of Israel, against whom the Lord of Hosts has been exceedingly angry for 70 years (1:12). The Lord of Hosts answered the angel with good and comforting words! This is obviously a reference to Christ/Messiah interceding for His people Israel.
 - 5) The Lord of Hosts indicates that although He was angry with His people Israel, He is exceedingly jealous over them. He is very angry with the Nations that are now at ease, and He is angry because although they helped Him judge Israel, they did it with an evil intent of heart (1:15). Therefore, they would be judged.
 - 6) Where He had come in anger and wrath, He would now return to Jerusalem with mercy and rebuild both His temple and the city (1:16-17).

2. ***Vision of the four horns and four craftsmen*** – God judges the nations who attacked Israel (1:18-21)

The four horns are symbols of power and pride and represent the strong nations that had attacked and oppressed God's people.

- a. In the immediate context they refer to Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.
- b. In the distant future they refer to Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (as in Daniel 2:7).

The four craftsmen are also horns (nations) that would rise up and destroy the nations that afflicted Israel. In this setting, a craftsman was also a horn, so a horn would be destroyed by a craftsman (also a horn) who would in turn be destroyed, and so on. Egypt was destroyed by Assyria, who was destroyed by Babylon, who was destroyed by Persia, who was destroyed by Greece, who was destroyed by Rome, who in its revived state will eventually be destroyed by Messiah and His Horn (Kingdom).

3. ***Vision of the man with the measuring line*** – God promises to rebuild Jerusalem (2:1-13)

A young man goes out with a measuring line to measure Jerusalem. The angel stops him and states the city is going to be so big and so densely populated that it will be impossible to measure it! (2:1-5). The Lord Himself would be her wall (defense) and the glory in her midst. How different from their present state of ruin and humility. What a comfort to this struggling remnant.

God promises to scatter them abroad, to spread them throughout all the earth (surely a millennium application). Those who touch or attack Israel touch the apple of God's eye (2:8). The apple of the eye is the most tender spot of the eye, the pupil. God is very sensitive and protective about Israel as we are about this part of our eye.

Israel is chosen by God and is called His "Holy Land" (2:12).

4. ***Vision of the cleansing of the High Priest*** – God purifies both His priest and His people (3:1-10)

The emphasis of the visions shift away from the political deliverance of Israel and the physical rebuilding of Jerusalem to the spiritual condition of the nation. Not only would God restore Israel as a political nation, He would cleanse Israel spiritually.

Joshua the high priest represents the nation. He is standing before the Angel of the Lord dressed in rags, and Satan is present opposing him. The Angel of the Lord silences Satan and instructs that Joshua be given clean clothes. He gives Joshua 3 important statements:

- a. Your iniquity is taken away (3:4) – justification and sanctification in view here. Note that Joshua is passive and silent. He has no defense against Satan's accusation, so Christ must take his defense. He can do nothing about his rags, so he must allow Christ to dress him!
- b. Walk in my ways and judge my people – I will give you places to walk (3:7)
- c. Joshua, I am bringing forth my servant the branch, and I

will place him before you. He will be all knowing and He will remove the iniquity of the land in one day! (3:8-9)

Note: While in this context, Joshua stands for the Nation of Israel that God will justify, and sanctify, and remove iniquity from when Messiah comes, and He will do it in one day. This passage does reveal in the OT what the NT describes happens to individuals who, like Joshua, stand before Christ and receive imputed righteousness (justification) and imparted righteousness (sanctification).

5. *Vision of the Golden lampstand and two olive trees* – God rebuilds His temple (4:1-14)

This vision is directed to Zerrubabel, the political leader of the remnant that had returned.

The lampstand is the Nation of Israel that is to be a light unto all the world. The two olive trees represent the two most important offices in the nation, the political leader and the spiritual leader. The oil represents the power that gives the lampstand light.

Zerrubabel the political leader and Joshua the high priest would stand by the lampstand and serve as a picture of the oil. One day Messiah would come and would occupy both offices, and as such, would be the source of the oil for Israel during the millennium.

The point – Zerrubabel needed to know that Israel would not survive or succeed in doing God's work by might or by power (4:6). What would allow him to lead this nation in the rebuilding of the temple was going to be the power provided by God's Spirit. The secret to Israel's success came from the oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit.

6. *Vision of the Flying Scroll* – God judges and purges individual sin and idolatry (5:1-4)

Once again the emphasis of the vision shifts. Zechariah now sees a flying scroll that is written on both sides and seems to contain a curse.

This scroll most likely represents the Law and the curse it brings on individuals who break the commandments that God gave. God will send out this Law, and it will judge and remove all the sinners from the Land; no one will escape. All that will live in the land will live obediently under the commands that are in the scroll.

This is obviously a reference to the rule of iron and the righteousness that shall permeate all of society during the millennium.

7. ***Vision of the Woman in the Basket*** – God contains and removes the system of false religion and sin itself (5:5-11)

This vision is connected to the former vision and shows how God will deal with the concept of sin and not just the sinners.

Not only will sinners be discovered and expelled (see vision of scroll), sin itself will be contained and then removed.

The land of Shinar/Babylon (v. 6) is a metaphor for the source of sin; sin itself will be bottled up and then sent to the place of its source.

This is a reference to God chaining Satan and sending him to the bottomless pit for 1000 years. Ultimately, Satan will be eternally contained and sent to His own place and all sin and sinners with him. God will not tolerate sin or sinners in either His millennial kingdom or in His eternal dwelling place!

He has dealt with the penalty and power of sin and will one day eliminate even the presence of sin!

8. ***Vision of the four chariots*** – God brings peace and rest to Israel (6:1-8)

This final vision ties us back to the four horses and riders in vision one. They are instructed to move swiftly and decisively and destroy the nations just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

The initial or partial fulfillment of this has already come upon Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, these nations will be represented in a reconstituted or revived Rome during the tribulation. This last vision seems to be looking ahead to that time.

9. *Conclusion of the Visions* – Crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)

This is the conclusion of the visions. Joshua, in Zerubbabel's day, was to be crowned, but the real point is that he was an illustration of another "Joshua – Jesus" who would be crowned as High Priest and King, the Branch of God, Messiah.

6:12-15 reveal 8 important facts about Messiah

- a. He will come from Israel (12)
- b. He will build the millennial temple (12b; 13a)
- c. He will be glorious (13)
- d. He will be king and priest (13)
- e. He makes peace (13)
- f. He opens the kingdom to the Gentiles (15a)
- g. He will corroborate God's word (15b)
- h. He demands obedience (15c)

III. **Four Messages of Zechariah about Fasting (7:1-8:23)**

A. *Questions about Fasting (7:1-3)*

In light of the encouraging words of these visions and in light of the fact that the temple was well on its way to being completed in the 4th year of Darius, a delegation of men came to Zechariah to ask him a very important question. Should we continue to keep the fast as we have done for many years?

What fast is in view? The fast in view here is a national fast that was held on this date to mourn and commemorate the fall of Jerusalem and particularly to mourn over the destruction and loss of the temple.

It is interesting that God had only commanded His people to observe one national fast, The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; 23:27, 29, 32). Over the years of the captivity, the nation had added several other national fasts to this one fast commanded by God. These fasts symbolized their mourning over the fall of Jerusalem. They are mentioned in Zech 7:3 and 8:13.

1. Feast of the 5th month – Destruction of Temple (7:3)
2. Feast of the 7th month – Death of Gedaliah the governor (7:5)
3. Feast of the 10th month – Beginning of the siege of Jerusalem (8:13)
4. Feast of the 4th month – Breaching of the Walls of Jerusalem (8:13)

Their question was, *“In light of all this good news and the partial rebuilding of the temple, should we continue to observe these national days of mourning?”*

God gives them a negative answer – *“No! stop fasting!”* God’s answer comes in four parts.

B. Four Responses (7:4-8:23)

1. Rebuke for wrong motives (7:4-7)

“When you fasted all those years in captivity, did you really fast for me? Did you really fast out of genuine sorrow and repentance – or was it simply self pity over the hardships of captivity and the loss of Jerusalem and the temple? Why were you fasting?”

2. Repentance required (7:8-14)

Zechariah reminds the questioners that the former prophets preached a strong message against sin. Had they really come to the place where they are willing to listen to them? Were they really willing to obey them?

“Your fathers heard but were unwilling to receive. They were unwilling to obey, and as a result I scattered them. No amount of religious activity on their part would save them. No amount of religious activity on your part will bring again my favor unless you repent and obey what I said to your fathers through the former prophets. My message has not changed. Have you?”

3. Restoration of favor (8:1-17)

Zechariah went on to observe that God stated His intention to restore Israel’s fortune. Did they believe Him or were they still believing a lie?

4. Fasts become Feasts (8:18-23)

“If you believe my words and obey, then there is no further need for fasting. When I bring all of these things to pass, these days that were national fast days for you will become national feast days!”

IV. Two Burdens of Zechariah (9:1-14:21)

This section was probably written about 30 - 40 years after chapters 1-8 and is intended to help the people who have been waiting for all the things Zechariah prophesied in his first message to them to come to pass.

They have finished the temple and have been waiting for almost 40 years, and still no Messiah. Zechariah refocuses their attention and encourages them to believe God and remain faithful; Messiah will come in the future!

A key phrase in this section is “in that day;” it is used 18 times. Zechariah uses this phrase to focus attention on two oracles or burdens. These two oracles or burdens give information about Messiah’s coming, and they reveal that there will actually be two comings.

At Messiah’s first coming, He will be rejected and pierced. In His second coming He will be recognized and accepted.

A. *Messiah’s Rejection at His First Advent (9:1-11:17)*

This oracle focuses on the destruction of the nations and the establishment of the Messiah as King. Surprisingly, it ends with the prophecy of Messiah’s rejection, which clearly indicates to Israel that there will be two comings of Messiah (11:7-14).

This section depicts Zechariah acting out how the Good Shepherd will come and be rejected by other shepherds. In sorrow, He will break His two staffs – beauty and bonds – which represent Christ and His messianic ministry. He will dismiss three shepherds in one month – the priests, elders, and scribes who are the official spiritual leadership of Israel. The crucifixion and burial of the shepherd is cryptically referred to in the 30 pieces of silver given to the potter and thrown into the house of the Lord (11:12-13).

Israel will be re-broken and re-scattered to the winds (8:13-17) as will her worthless shepherds.

B. *Messiah’s Acceptance at His Second Advent (12:1-14:21)*

This section depicts Israel’s second and final re-gathering and restoration. It depicts her ultimate and final deliverance and salvation.

At this time, she will recognize her Messiah as the one she pierced and will mourn for Him nationally (12:10ff). In response to her true repentance, God will remove all idols and wickedness from her midst (13:1-6) and will become her Shepherd King (13:7-9).

The oracle ends with a great description of that final and great Day of

the Lord at the end of the millennium and which results in the establishment of the millennial Kingdom of Messiah (14).

In this kingdom, all nations shall worship the Lord annually (14:6) and shall be swiftly and severely punished for failure to obey or observe their religious duty (14:19). All morally unclean or unfit people will be excluded from millennial worship (14:20).

All the land and its inhabitants, animals, and objects shall be affected and measured by the standard of temple holiness (14:20).

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Malachi
“Whom Do You Honor?”

Introduction:

We show how much we value another person by the honor we ascribe to him. What or who we honor reveals something about our values and what is important to us.

We tend to act in accordance to our values. If we value someone or something we will act differently toward it than we would if we did not value it.

Often times we think of honor in terms of giving someone an award or public recognition for something good he has done or some great achievement he has reached in his life. We honor people at commencement activities. We honor people at special banquets and celebrations.

However, true honor goes much deeper than words, applause, and accolades. True honor is more about the actions and the attitudes that affect those actions than it is about words and lip praise.

We can say we honor someone and render appropriate words of praise. However, if by our actions or lack thereof we show that we really have little value for that person, then our honor is really pseudo-honor; in fact, it is not honor at all!

As bad as this is when we have little honor or false honor for people, it is inexcusable when we who claim to be God’s children fail to give Him true and appropriate honor.

Most of us would quickly render words of praise and “honor” to Him. We might even attend ceremonies and services held in His name and designed to honor Him. However, our actions and the attitudes that are revealed thereby will tell the real story.

If we honor what we value, and if we truly express that honor by our actions, then our best actions and attitudes should be reserved for that which we honor most. If I truly honor God above all, then that honor should be tangibly expressed by what I give, what I do, what I say, what I sacrifice and offer, and what I think and feel about Him!

So, the real question is not do you honor God on Sunday and at church? The real question is do you really honor God in your daily life? It is but false or empty honor on Sunday that is not true and active honor on Monday!

Given that your values reveal who you honor, who are you really honoring?

Title:

The book bears the name of its author, Malachi. Malachi's name means "*Yahweh's Messenger*," and his words make the final message that God would send to His people before the coming of Christ.

Author / Date:

Very little is known about Malachi other than he was the last of the writing prophets in the Old Testament. Rabbinic tradition held that he was a member of the great Synagogue that collected and preserved the Old Testament Scriptures.

The dating of the book can be generally established by the following observations. First, sacrifices were going on in the restored temple and seem to have been for some time. This dates the book later than 516 B.C. Second, Micah addresses many of the same concerns addressed by Nehemiah which indicates a probable date around the same date as Nehemiah's book. Third, Malachi seems to assume the people had possession of the written Law of God (4:4) which we know Ezra compiled and restored to Israel (Ezra 7:14, 25, 26). Ezra arrived in Judah about 458 B.C. Nehemiah was governor over Judah twice, the latter time being in 433 B.C. Fourth, Malachi refers to a "governor" of Judah, and it may be here that he is referring to those who governed after Ezra's arrival in 458 B.C. but before Nehemiah's second governorship (had he been referring to Nehemiah he probably would have referred to him by name) in 433 B.C.

It seems safe to date the book somewhere between 458 B.C. and 445 B.C.

Historical Background:

Malachi ministered in Israel almost 100 years after the temple had been rebuilt in 516 B.C. in the days of Zerubbabel, Zechariah, and Haggai.

After 100 years of restored worship, the people had slowly slipped back into their old ways. While they never returned to idols, they never fully returned to God with a whole heart. The same complacency and misplaced values that Haggai rebuked in his day before the building of the second temple were present in Malachi's day. The history of this nation was a repeated cycle of the people turning to God, then growing complacent, then repenting for a brief period of time, and then back to their old ways.

To compound the issue, none of the expected promises of God had yet come to pass. The judgments that the prophets had predicted had come upon them with bone-chilling accuracy. However, either the prophets were greatly exaggerating the promises of a glorious restoration or these promises had still not been fulfilled. After waiting for over a hundred years for Messiah to show up in His temple and restore the glory back to Israel, people were starting to grow skeptical. Persia was still the world

power of the day and Messiah seemed nowhere in sight. Had God forgotten? He had remembered to judge but had He forgotten to fully restore or was this the extent of it? Was this all there was, or was there still more to come?

It was to a people in this setting that God sent one final messenger to remind His people of His steadfast love and to assure them that He had not forgotten His word to them. This was not all there was; there was yet more to come. But, before that, there was still work to do in the hearts of the people.

Outline:

The fifty-five verses which make up Malachi's prophecy can be arranged in 6 sections that form a running dialogue between God and His people. In this dialog, God frequently makes a strong declaration about or against His people. This declaration is usually followed by a rebuttal or protest from the people that God's declaration is not accurate. This is then followed by evidence that indicts the people and establishes God's original charge against them. (The following divisions are from Kaiser's commentary on Malachi)

1. 1:1-5 Introduction. God proves His love for Israel by contrasting it to His treatment of Edom.
2. 1:6-2:9 God rebukes the priesthood for their perversion of the ordinances and the Law of God.
3. 2:10-16 God rebukes the people for perverting God's ordinance of marriage by marrying unbelievers and then divorcing their wives.
4. 2:17-3:6 God announces His messenger who will prepare the way for His Messiah as the answer to the people's search for justice.
5. 3:7-12 God rebukes the people for withholding the tithes and offerings owed to God.
6. 3:13-4:6 God predicts the destinies of the wicked and of the righteous.

<i>The Structure of Malachi</i>			
Introduction Yahweh's Sovereign Love	The Priest's Sin against Love	The People's Sin against Love	Final Exhortation
1:1-5	1:6-2:9	2:10-4:3	4:4-6

Malachi's Message

God's messenger came to God's people and issued six direct, distinct, and impacting calls that the people were to obey. Those calls all relate to the responsibility that God's people have in light of His unchanging love for them (1:2; 3:6).

I. A Call to Respond to God's Love (1:1-5)

At the heart of the Old Testament covenant stood the love of God. The most holy place in the temple housed the "Ark of the Covenant." It was called this because it contained the Covenant God had made with Israel. Above the covenant was the everlasting symbol of God's love for His people – the mercy seat!

Here, God begins His discourse with His people by reminding them of His love (1:2). Amazingly, the people brazenly challenge God's statement of love by demanding evidence to prove that in fact He really was loving them as He claimed.

A. *The Assurance of God's Love*

God declared that He had always and certainly loved His people Israel. Note the use of the perfect tense in this verse to indicate the permanence and certitude of God's claim. God leaves no room for question as to how He truly feels toward His people. Everything that He had ever done for them or brought upon them was built on this assuring foundation.

Even His righteous anger and His just judgment upon them for their sin had come because of His deep love for them. At the heart of His dealings with them was this amazing, assuring, and permanent love for them.

B. *The Object of God's Love*

When such love appears, one expects it to be directed to an object or a person worthy of such devotion. However, in this case God declares that He has directed this kind of love to them, to Israel. "I have loved you!"

When one considers the dismal record of Israel's actions in the 38 books preceding this one, God's declaration of love is even more amazing! After all that has happened and is even happening at that moment, the first statement God makes is "I have loved you!"

C. *The Challenge to God's Love*

Unbelievably, these people had the audacity to question God's love for them and to demand proof for such a claim (1:2).

Rather than rest on the great and loving acts He had done in the past for Israel (Exodus, Provision in Wilderness, Protection from National extermination), or the gracious gifts He had given (covenant, promises, law, temple, sacrifices), or His merciful restoration after judgment (other nations God had judged were permanently exterminated), and the restoration of their temple and sacrificial system, these people rose up and demanded further evidence.

D. *The Evidence of God's Love (1:3-5)*

God graciously and lovingly condescended and acquiesced to their demand by reminding them that He had chosen (loved) them and rejected (hated) their brother Edom. Furthermore, He had continued to demonstrate this sovereign love in how He determined to judge both nations. When He had judged Edom, He had completely devastated Edom. Furthermore, God would not restore Edom, and any attempt by Edom to rebuild what God had torn down would be torn down again by God. Finally, God had permanently set His anger toward Edom (1:4).

Not so with Israel. Though they had been just as wicked, God had chosen to handle them differently. He had judged but not exterminated. He had torn down, but He had rebuilt and would again restore in a future day. Whereas He had set His anger permanently on Edom, He had set His love permanently on Israel.

II. A Call to Be Authentic (1:6-14)

The only adequate response to such love is to honor the One who loves in this fashion. This is what constitutes being authentic in our relationship to God. We who have experienced such love often return this love with empty words. God is not looking for mere declarations of love from us. He desires the appropriate honor that such love merits.

Since true honor is reflected in actions and attitudes and not just words, our lives becomes a fair assessment of how we value or honor God.

A. *In Our Profession of God (1:6-7)*

This nation claimed that God was their Father and they were His sons. They claimed that He was their master and they His servants. The way

they primarily thought to portray these relationships was through their declarations and their religious service at the temple.

If one came and asked why the sacrifices and to whom, one answer would be we do this because God is our Father/Master, and we are His sons/servants.

However, God now asks a penetrating question. If, as you claim, I am your Father/Master and you are My sons/servants, then where is My honor and where is My respect? Why do you dishonor me? A son/servant honors and reverences his father/master – why do you despise Me (1:7)?

The challenge back was instantaneous. “How have we dishonored you?”

These people claimed to honor and reverence God as a Father and as a Master, but only with their lips. When one looked at their lives, their claim was empty. There was no honor, and there was no reverence! The words of honor were denounced by their works of dishonor and disrespect.

B. In Our Gifts to God (1:8-9)

God goes on to show exactly how the nation had dishonored and defiled Him – in what they brought for sacrifice.

Instead of bringing whole, perfect, and healthy animals for sacrifice to God, they brought the weak, ill, and deformed animals and piously offered them as some great sacrifice to God!

In blistering terms God instructed them to take these same “gifts” and present them to the governor of their land and see what response he would give them. If they would not expect their earthly governor to accept such gifts, why did they even think God would accept them?

In essence, to offer such blemished and deformed gifts to the governor was actually a sign of disrespect and dishonor, so these gifts had revealed the true heart of the people. In their hearts, they really did not honor God nor did they reverence Him.

God merits our best gifts and only our best gifts. Sometimes those best gifts may be small and insignificant like that of the widow and her two mites. However, the gift must be our best and not that which we don't want or need. Anything less not only is no sacrifice, it is in effect, dishonor!

With biting sarcasm Malachi instructs the priests who have accepted such sacrifices and encouraged such practices to attempt to approach God and seek His favor at the same time they are engaged in these contemptible deeds.

The idea behind “entreat” is that of a person taking his hands and trying to smooth away the frown from the face of another. “Go and try to smooth over God’s face, and bring your sick and lame animals in the process! Will He respond in favor? No!”

C. *In Our Service For God (1:10-12)*

God has no pleasure in such hypocritical and empty worship and service. In fact, He would rather have no worship than this kind of inauthentic service.

Malachi makes a shocking statement and suggests that the doors to the temple be closed and the fire on the altar of sacrifice would be put out as God had no pleasure in the empty and inauthentic worship that was happening in that place.

Malachi contrasts the present dishonor and disrespect toward God’s name going on in Israel with the future honor and respect that the pagan nations would one day give to God’s name. In the future, God’s name (so despised at that time by His people) would be greatly magnified by all the nations all the time! In every place they would offer incense and pure sacrifices to Him.

If these pagan nations would come to the place where they knew how to give God honor, after all that God had done to teach Israel about Him, why had they not learned to honor His name? Why were they profaning it (1:12)? Why did they despise the worship of the One who had so loved them (1:12)?

D. *In Our Relationship With God (1:13-14)*

God continues His case against Israel by focusing on their relationship to Him. They had profaned and despised their worship of God (1:8-12), because they did not maintain an authentic relationship with God.

They considered worshipping God and doing acts of loving service for Him to be “wearisome.” They sneered and despised the burden of worshipping God as He demanded to be worshipped. They came to God but at their convenience. They were wanting the benefits of worship and relationship but were not willing to joyfully bear the burden and responsibilities associated with such a wonderful

relationship. Instead, they sneered and counted it tiresome and oppressive.

III. A Call to Love God Wholly (2:1-9)

God now turns and directs a specific message to the priests where He instructs them to love and serve Him wholeheartedly. This would involve two things that were sadly lacking in them.

A. *A Wholehearted Love for God's Glory (2:1-3)*

At the heart of their worthless worship was an unwillingness to give glory to the God who had appointed them as priests (2:2).

Unless they were willing to make a radical life change and serve Him with wholehearted service, God would send a curse upon them (2:3). God promised to curse their descendants, to reject the blessings they uttered upon the people in His name, and to rub their faces in the entrails and dung of the very sacrifices they offered to Him on the altar.

Strong words come to people who should know better than to live and act in ways that dishonor God. If anyone should have honored God, it was the priests. Every time an individual brought an unacceptable animal, the priest should have rejected the animal and used the opportunity to rebuke, instruct, and exhort the people to honor God's name by obedient worship. Instead, they not only facilitated this wicked worship, they led the people headlong into dishonorable service to God.

When the priests and religious leaders don't love and serve God wholeheartedly, it is no surprise to discover that the people who follow their example don't love God either.

B. *A Wholehearted Love for God's Word (2:4-9)*

In addition to rebuking the priests for failing to love and serve God with a whole heart, God rebukes them for failing to love His covenant Word enough to live obediently under its demands. As a result of their disobedience, instead of turning men away from iniquity to God, they actually were leading men headlong down the path of wickedness! To whom much has been given much shall be required.

IV. A Call to Be Loyal and Faithful (2:10-16)

Malachi's preaching has exposed a glaring fault in the lives of both the priests and the people. There was a horrible lack of loyalty in their lives. The opposite of loyalty is unfaithfulness. The nation as a whole had experienced an unbroken history of God's faithfulness toward them! However, they had consistently repaid this loyal love with unfaithfulness.

They had been unfaithful in three areas. They had been unfaithful to God and His covenant; they had been unfaithful to their obligations to remain a distinct and separate nation, and they had been unfaithful to their marriages.

A. *We Must be Loyal to God and His Covenant (2:10)*

The people had dealt "treacherously" with one another by profaning the covenant of our fathers (Mosaic covenant -- 2:10). Malachi is going to reveal two specific acts of treachery that were being committed openly and blatantly: marrying pagan foreign women and divorcing their legitimate covenant wife.

However, what is interesting here is that Malachi notes that these violations of the covenant were not just acts of treachery against God; they were acts of treachery against one another!

The entire nation would be affected by the disloyal acts of its individual citizens. So it has always been with God's people as seen in examples like that of Achan (Judges 7). Our sin always affects others!

B. *We Must be Loyal to the People of God (2:11-12)*

Not only have the people dealt treacherously with one another, Judah as a nation has acted treacherously against her national holiness. The "holy institution which God loves" is most likely a reference to the nation and not to the institution of marriage per se.

This holy nation that God loves has been profaned by the disloyalty of those who had violated God's command and married pagan and idolatrous women. This had not been done in ignorance of God's expectation. Malachi observes this was done by one who was awake and aware (2:13).

God promised devastating judgment on the one who willfully profaned and endangered the holiness of Israel and yet brazenly approached the altar with sacrifices to a holy God. God would cut such a man off!

C. *We Must be Loyal to our Partner in Marriage (2:13-16)*

Not only had Israel been disloyal to God and His covenant and to the Nation and her holiness; they had also been disloyal to their wives and in their marriages.

Many of them had blatantly disregarded God's covenant stipulations regarding the prohibition of divorce and were setting apart their legitimate covenant wives. These were legitimate and honorable marriages to Jewish women who honored and obeyed the covenant. No trespass such as adultery or idolatry had occurred. Malachi reminds the nation of what God has said before – "God hates divorce!" (2:16).

V. A Call to Unqualified Trust in our Unchanging God (2:17-3:12)

In the previous sections of the book, Malachi speaks of the people becoming weary of God and the requirements of worship (1:13). Now, God declares that He is becoming weary of His people! Specifically, He is becoming weary of their constant doubting of His faithfulness in justice! (2:17)

A. *We Can Trust Because He is Always Just (2:17-3:6)*

The people were speaking against the Lord and declaring that He was not just and holy. They looked around and observed that life seemed to indicate that God delighted in the one who did evil because these people never seemed to get evil compensation from God for their wickedness.

God answered this charge by announcing the coming of His messengers (3:1)! When these messengers would arrive on the scene, all questions about God's justice would be settled forever!

1. The First Messenger

He would be called God's messenger, and his purpose would be to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (3:1). This imagery is drawn from Isaiah 40:3-5, and we later learn that this messenger was none other than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14; Luke 1:17).

2. The Great Messenger – the Angel of the Covenant (3:1)

After the preparation of the first messenger had been complete, the Lord would appear suddenly in His temple. The Angel of the Lord/Covenant, the One you are all longing for, will come! This is a clear Messianic reference.

B. *We Can Trust Because He is Always Faithful (3:7-12)*

The second immutable quality that God reminds Israel of is His immutable character (3:12). He never changes. He goes on to contrast His faithfulness with their unfaithfulness and their fickleness. He closes by challenging them to put His faithfulness to the test to see if what He claimed was in fact true.

1. *Evidence of His faithfulness (3:6 -7)*

The nation had not been consumed in spite of their constant and continual departure from His commandments and ordinances in the past (3:6).

He gave a gracious invitation to even now repent of their current unfaithfulness and return to Him and He would receive them (3:7).

2. *Evidence of their unfaithfulness (3:7-8)*

The people responded to this gracious invitation by saying, “Why do we need to return? We have nothing to repent of; we have not gone astray. How can we return if we never departed?”

To help these people come to grips with the reality of their departure from God, He asks them a simple question designed to penetrate their defenses. “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! How, you say? In the area of your tithes and offerings” (3:8).

3. *Invitation to return to faithfulness (3:10-14)*

God invites the people to put His goodness and unchanging faithfulness to the test. God had always been faithful to punish His people for their disobedience (3:9). However, He was just as faithful and prepared to always bless His people when they repented and obeyed (3:10-12). If they would obey with a whole heart, He would pour out such a blessing upon them that there would not be room enough to contain it (3:10). Not only would they be blessed, but they would become a blessing to others around them (3:12). ***God allowed His people to determine for themselves if their obedience to Him made a difference in their lives.***

VI. A Call to Serious Spiritual Evaluation (3:13-4:6)

In this final section God speaks once again to His people. He accuses them of speaking harsh words against Him (3:13). He answers their objection by reminding them that they have concluded that serving God was an empty and profitless endeavor (3:14).

God calls this questioning nation to seriously evaluate their charges against Him. They have repeatedly lifted up their voices against Him in this book. They have consistently come to wrong conclusions about His nature and character. They have continually determined that serving Him was wearisome and worthless. Now it was time to stop the questioning and start doing some serious heart searching to see if they really were His people at all!

It is interesting that Malachi presents two distinct groups of individuals in Israel in this section. There were those who had concluded that it was useless to serve God and spoke against God (3:13-15) and there were those who feared the Lord who spoke to one another (3:16).

It is normal and natural for God's children to question their Father from time to time. In fact, the scripture records many such questions from Job, Haggai, and others. However, when a person who claims to know God constantly questions God's character and regularly comes to wrong conclusions about God, when a person constantly has harsh words to say about the God he claims to love, then perhaps it is time to ask whether that person truly knows God and belongs to God.

A. *Is it Vain to Serve God? (3:13-18)*

The first group of people highlighted in this passage spoke against the Lord, and their speech actually bordered on blasphemy indicating there was no fear of God in their hearts.

They had concluded that it was useless to serve God. They went on to state there was no profit in observing the commandments and mourning over their sin. Why these conclusions? Because it is the proud man whom God blesses. It is the wicked man whom God honors and lifts up. Those who tempt God are the ones He sets free! Therefore, it is vain for us to serve God (3:13-15).

The second group of people highlighted in this passage feared God and spoke to one another (3:16). God heard their speech and determined to

honor and reward them for their righteousness and faithfulness in fearing Him and meditating on His name.

Contrary to what had been charged, it was not vain to serve the Lord. The wicked might prosper for a season, but God would not forget either the evil of the wicked or the faithfulness of those who feared Him.

In spite of what some had concluded, there would be great profit and sure reward in serving the Lord. The Lord would claim the righteous for Himself; they would be precious to Him (3:17). He would spare them from His fury on that great coming day of wrath (3:17).

Then, you will see that there really is a difference between the righteous and the wicked. Then you will understand that there is a distinct advantage and unbelievable profit to the one who serves God in contrast to the one who does not serve Him (3:18).

B. *Is there really no Difference Between the Righteous and the Wicked? (4:1-3)*

God's people are further instructed to give serious investigation to the question partially answered in 3:18. God gives further information to assure the nation that there really would be a difference between the righteous and the wicked. That difference would be most obvious with the arrival of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord mentioned 4 times in Malachi (3:17; 4:1, 3, 5) would be both wonderful and terrible in nature.

- 1. It would be a glorious day (3:17-18).***
- 2. It would be a terrible day (4:1).***
- 3. It would be a day of healing (4:2).***
- 4. It would be a victorious day (4:3).***

In a day when evil triumphs over good more often than not, this promise of a coming day when good will triumph over evil gives occasion for great joy and hope!

Truly, it is worthwhile to serve the Lord.

C. *Are there really no Guides for the Righteous? (4:4-6)*

So, what are God's faithful people to do while waiting for the coming of that Day? What is to be the response of those who are questioning the value of fearing God in light of this future day?

Each man is to seriously investigate to see whether or not God has left any instructions to guide His people until the coming of that day. God has provided two specific guides:

1. *The Guide of His Word*

God's people were instructed to give careful attention to God's Word as a guide for life. In Malachi's day, this would have been the Law of Moses. God exhorted His people to give careful attention to living their lives in conformity with His revealed word. If they were going to bear His name and expected to enjoy the blessings of His covenant relationship, then they had to live accordingly, in conformity to His Law!

So it is with us today. If we desire to see God's blessing upon our lives, if we desire to honor Him as our Father, then we must live as His obedient sons. He has not left us clueless as to what He expects from us. He has given us His Word. It is ours to read and to obey!

2. *The Guide of His Messenger*

Not only did God leave us His Word as a guide. He promised to send His messenger to guide us in the way of truth. In the national history of Israel, this was fulfilled by the ministry of John the Baptist who came and turned the hearts of the children toward their fathers. In other words, he turned the hearts of many of the Children of Israel toward the affections and worship of the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! In a more general sense, there is a Messenger that God has sent to turn the hearts of His children toward Him – the Holy Spirit.

As you and I meditate on the Word of God and live under the direction and guidance of the Spirit of God, then we will avoid the curse of God on that great and coming Day of the Lord.

Conclusion:

And so ends the last word from God to the people of the Old Testament. None of the promises have been fulfilled. None of the longings have been satisfied. Many of the ceremonies remained unexplained. Yet in spite of all this, and in light of the coming One Who would fulfill the promises, satisfy the longings, and explain the ceremonies,

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God's people could still rejoice in the one unchanging fact – God had chosen to love them! (1:2)

We may not be able to understand, explain, or always see God's love for us, but we must never doubt it! We must never forget it! We must rejoice in it! We must always live faithfully because of it! Truly, it is worthwhile to serve such a God!