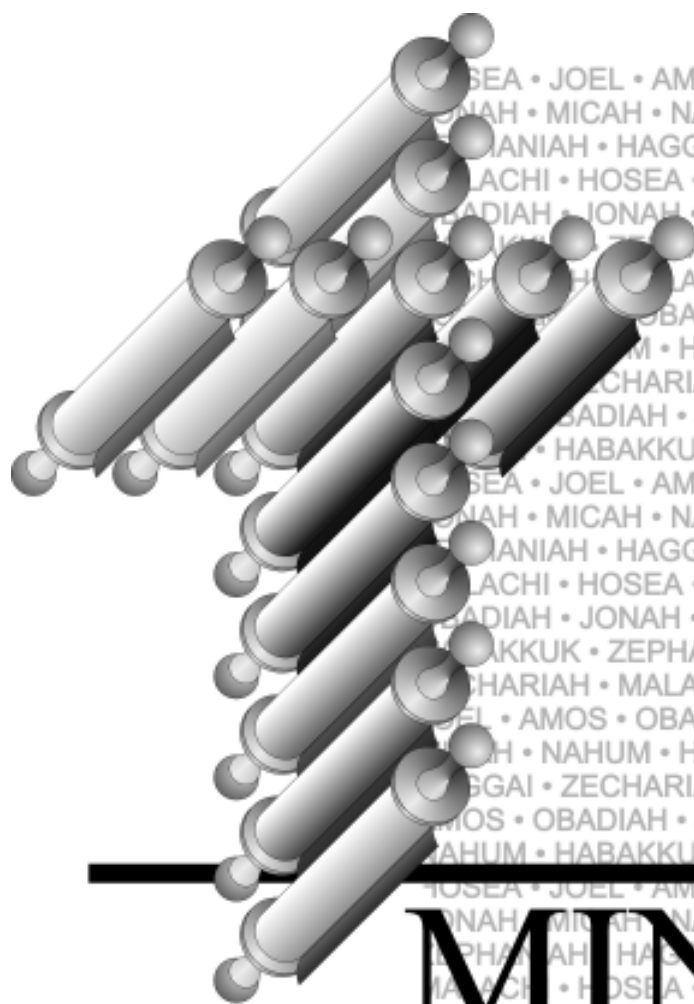


THE
MINOR
PROPHETS

Timothy Tow



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The Minor Prophets

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Foreword

The Minor Prophets, numbering twelve, are so-called not because they are of less importance than the four Major Prophets. They are called Minor Prophets because they are shorter in length than the Major Prophets, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.

The sixteen Prophets may be divided into four groups.

- (1) Prophets of the Northern Kingdom, viz., Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah.
- (2) Prophets of the Southern Kingdom, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
- (3) Prophets of the Captivity, viz., Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (4) Prophets of the Return, viz., Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

What are the characteristics of the prophetic ministry? The prophets are primarily spokesmen of God. They were raised of God to denounce the sins of God's people, the children of Israel, for their grave apostasy and to cause them to repent. The prophets were revivalists to the wayward Jewish church.

However, God being a covenant God, would forgive them for the promises made to their fathers. Hence the prophetic utterances looking forward to the time of their final Restoration.

Israel will be delivered from the dispersion to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem will rise again to the top of the world. David's Greater Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will sit upon the throne of His father and rule the earth for a thousand years of peace.

The study of Zechariah is especially vital for us, living in the last of the last days, before His Return. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Timothy Tow

1. Hosea

Introduction

Hosea is first of the Minor Prophets, though chronologically he is preceded by Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. The Minor Prophets are so called not because they are of lesser importance than the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel). They are called Minor Prophets because their writings are shorter than those of the Major Prophets.

Jehovah is likened to a Father to the people of God in the O.T. More often he is called her husband to show the endearing relationship between the Lord and His chosen ones. In Isaiah 54:5,6 God returned to His estranged people (in spite of their sins):

For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

In the Book of Hosea we see not only the message of Jehovah being Israel's constant loving husband preached, but acted out in flesh and blood. The prophet is commanded to marry an adulterous woman, Gomer by name. Three children were born to them. Would you not expect the wife to be faithfully committed to her husband henceforth? Sorry to say, No! She went on in her adulterous escapades as before. This is a picture of Israel who goes a-whoring after other gods, time and time again, oblivious of her Redeemer. Worshipping other gods and their idols is spiritual adultery.

Because the love of God for His people is unchanging even as His holy character remains constant without fail, so Jehovah is willing to accept his erring ones back to His fold, when they repent. This message vividly acted out by the prophet and his family is in line with Isaiah, who declares, “Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion” (8:18).

Hosea prophesied after Amos to the Northern Kingdom about the time Isaiah and Micah ministered to the Southern Kingdom. From this tumultuous sad life living with an adulterous wife he is called the broken-hearted prophet of the Northern Kingdom as Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet of the Southern Kingdom. While Hosea was a faithful husband even to an unfaithful wife, in Israel there were many religious leaders who were the reverse (Malachi 2:12-14). Every minister of God must take care how he lives, not to self and and sinful pleasure, but to God and to His glory.

Chapter I

An Adulterous Wife And Three Abandoned Children

To have a clearer idea of the times in which the prophet lived, refer to your charts of kings and prophets. Take note of King Jeroboam in verse 1. He is Jeroboam II, not the First.

The level of morality in Hosea's days is no better than our day. In other words it is hard to guarantee any bride's virginity on her wedding day in his time as it is in our time. Promiscuous and pre-marital sex has taken its toll. This is reflected in the days that follow. "Easy come, easy go." In the western world one out of two marriages ends up in divorce. Singapore is catching up as our divorce rate rises from year to year.

In Hosea's case, he is specifically told to marry an unchaste woman in order to act out God's magnanimous saving plan. (A Christian minister whom I knew married a woman of ill-fame. He excused himself by hiding under Hosea's case. Such argument is like a wicker basket that holds no water.) Gomer his wife bears him a son and God tells him to call him Jezreel. Jezreel! This was where wicked King Ahab had his palace built, but became the "killing fields" when his 70 sons were executed by Jehu whom God raised to punish Ahab. "So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining" (II Kings 10:11). Though Jehu did a good job, he had "overkilled." In turn the house of Jehu would be judged.

Now a second child, Lo-ruhamah a daughter was born, which means “No Mercy.” As Jezreel the “Killing Fields” is to be judged, so will the whole house of Israel be mercilessly dealt with. Judah the Southern Kingdom, nevertheless, will be spared.

Finally a third child, a son is born and he is called “Lo-ammi,” “Not My People.” Israel is to be cast off.

Inasmuch as God is the Father and Husband of His people the prophet is given a vision of the restoration of the divided kingdoms under one head. Jezreel, “Killing Fields” will be a changed place in the future, “for great shall be the day of “Jezreel” (1:11). This looks forward to the Millennium.

Chapter II

Spiritual And Political Adultery

The unhappy domestic life of the prophet passes out of sight and Jehovah is now taking up the case against Israel, who like Hosea's wife, has been unfaithful to Him. Like the adulterous wife going after her lovers who lavish their gifts on her, Israel has left her Lord for material gains. This is political adultery. Israel did not realise it was their God who gave them good seasons and fruitfulness, yea, even gains of silver and gold. Israel had forgotten what Moses told their fathers, "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Instead of returning a portion to the Lord they rather offered them to Baal. This is spiritual adultery.

Can we not learn a lesson from this? When a Christian is blessed by God with material wealth, instead of thanking his Lord and worshipping with greater fervency, he backslides instead. He begins rather to love the world, and when he loves the world the love of the Father is not in him (I John 2:15). He withholds his tithes which Malachi denounces as robbing God (Malachi 3:8).

To remedy this situation God must chastise us.

Baali is the heathen name for my Lord and *Ishi* is the Hebrew name for my husband. The name of God must be properly addressed. For example the Chinese call God the Heavenly Grandfather. Christians call God Heavenly Father.

Verses 18-23 after chiding Israel for her lewdness looks forward to the day when idolatrous (adulterous) Israel will be totally cleansed and she will live in peace and plenty. God will call them “Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.”

Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

Chapter III

Adulterous Wife Redeemed And “Quarantined”

This chapter tells of the prophet’s wife leaving her husband to live with one of her lovers. In fact she has become a concubine-slave, being penniless when she left home. Yet Hosea’s love for her remains constant like Jehovah’s love for Israel.

Being now sunken to the position of a concubine-slave she has to be redeemed. And the price paid is 15 pieces of silver (shekels), a homer of barley, and half a homer of barley. This would be less than the 30 shekels, the price charged for a slave (Exodus 21:32). Barley, of lower value than wheat, is the food of the poor and of animals.

After the wandering wife returned to her husband, she is put under probation. As she is now “quarantined” from her paramours, she will be kept apart from her husband at the same time. As it is said, “absence makes the heart grow fonder” this should renew her affections towards Hosea. While this may be true, there is a spiritual lesson to be drawn from the situation.

As Gomer now is “sentenced” to a grass widowhood (i.e. separate from any physical contact with her husband), so will Israel be weaned from the presence of their God: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim” (3:4).

Chapter IV

Israel Under Trial

Like the court setting in Isaiah 1, the scene changes to Israel now brought under trial. God is both plaintiff and judge and the accused the Northern Kingdom.

The children of Israel have degenerated to a people devoid of truth, mercy and knowledge of God. Here is a catalogue of their sins:

1. swearing and lying (perjury)
2. killing and stealing
3. adultery upon adultery
4. murder upon murder
5. whoredom and drunkenness
6. idolatry and will worship, etc.

Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will

also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart. (Hosea 4:3-11)

The Lord's "controversy" repudiates the entire priesthood as they have rejected the true knowledge of God. They have inclined to calf-worship, and Baal, and connived at moral offences.

The increase in number and prosperity probably refers to the priesthood, who as they grew in numbers became more alienated from the true God. These eat up, falter on the very sins they ought to rebuke. The reference here may be either to the portion of sacrificial offerings which falls to the priests or to the sin-money and trespass money exacted in place of sin-offerings (II Kings 12:16).

Chapter V

Wicked Rulers That Lead The Nation to Destruction

The prophet now turns to the priests and the royal house of Israel. House of the king refers to his garrisons on both sides of the Jordan — Mizpah on the east in Gilead and Tabor on the west. These are the military strongholds where the princes and the apostate priests waylay the common people. Judgement is ripe for these wicked rulers who were becoming more wicked all the time.

Ephraim is the chief tribe of the Northern Kingdom. The spirit of whoredom, of idolatry and sexual sins grips them and arrogance against Judah characterises their history beginning with Jeroboam I. This results in the division of the Kingdom.

To obey is better than sacrifice, but the weightier things of the law are cast aside in favour of empty rituals. Strange children refers to offspring that follow in the ways of their mother (compare Chapter 1). Strange children may also refer to intermarriage with heathens.

Cornet is made like the bent horn of an animal and trumpet is long and straight, of metallic substance. Both are instruments to warn the people of danger and convoking them to assemblage. Gibeah and Ramah were lofty hills where the alarms of approaching danger were sounded. Both Israel (Ephraim) and Judah, would not be able to escape God's judgment. The princes of Judah erased all lines of separation between truth and falsehood like those who removed landmarks (Deuteronomy 19:14), while the Israelites followed

Jeroboam I to worship the golden calf, a great offence to Jehovah. God therefore punished them both when they sought help from the Assyrian king instead of turning to the Lord.

The Northern Kingdom to which this message is addressed would go into captivity of the Assyrians. Samaria the Northern capital fell in 722 B.C. The Israelites who went into exile never returned. This diaspora would last over 2,000 years until the Messiah comes. Israel is now returned to their land, but until Messiah comes, they have no permanent rest.

Chapter VI

Mercy Is Greater Than Sacrifice, Obedience Is Better Than Rituals

This chapter follows closely the previous chapter. The words of imperfect penitence is put by the prophet into the lips of those who are in trouble, and are counting too soon on the compassions of Jehovah. They are not an exhortation to repentance, for they are followed by indignant protests.

The challenge to the pious rhetoric comes from Jehovah Himself, “O Ephraim, (chief tribe of the Northern Kingdom) what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. . . For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (verses 4-6). According to Mark 12:33 which shows an O.T. teaching, the moral ranks above the ceremonial, that ritual is valueless apart from spiritual conformity with the Divine will. They are also covenant breakers for Israel had violated all the terms on which the goodly land of conditional promise had been bestowed.

Gilead, i.e. Ramoth-Gilead is one of the six cities of refuge. A city of refuge is where an innocent killer, i.e. by accident, can find protection from his pursuer. But now it is turned into a shelter for murderers. And who are the murderers? They are the priests who first rob a man before killing him, “for they commit lewdness.” The crime of robbery leading to murder is further complicated by sexual assault.

Ephraim and Judah are subsequently discriminated. The horrible thing about Ephraim (Israel) is their polluting idolatry. The harvest to Judah is not one of joy, as in the Feast of Tabernacles, but of sorrow and affliction.

Chapter VII

Samaria The Source Of Corruption Of The Whole Nation

Jehovah charges, “When I would have healed Israel, then is revealed the iniquity of Ephraim and the wickedness of Samaria that they commit falsehood.” Samaria here sustains the same relationship to Israel that Jerusalem does to Judah. Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, is the very source of corruption of the whole country. In modern terms she is like Bangkok the sex capital of Thailand (according to a British publication). The wicked deeds of the nation crowded around them as witnesses to reveal their treason against Jehovah.

This evil arouses no alarm but rather gladness in the hearts of their kings and governors. They are prone to evil but not to good. Their lustfulness is compared to a baker’s oven which must be constantly fuelled except when the baker is kneading the dough — the fire of lustfulness is an ever-burning rage. This burning rage is further sustained by filling up the king and his princes with wine. Being drunk the king joins the company of the dissolute and depraved. This is totally contrary to the preacher’s teaching, “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted” (Proverbs 31:4-5).

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.” This refers to the destructive effect of foreign influences. Ephraim was consumed by the

poisonous fumes of Baal-worship, with all the lustful practices — a cake burnt on one side to a cinder and on the other is a condition utterly unfit for food. Ephraim is ruined.

Chapter VIII

One Aspect Of The Theology Of War

The indictment of Israel continues in another vein. Jehovah bids the prophet put the trumpet to his lips and blow a shrill blast, announcing the approach of disaster. The theology of war comes into play. The enemy Assyria is soon swooping down on Samaria because God's people have transgressed His covenant and trespassed His law. Thus Isaiah also prophesied, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6).

In trouble Israel calls upon God for deliverance, but no response from Him. For they have cast off their God when they did not need Him.

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices (Proverbs 1:24-31).

She is now left to the mercy of her enemy. Since the death of Jeroboam II there has been a spate of assassination of king after king while their worship of idols in silver and gold went on unabated. But the calf of Samaria will cast them off and in turn it will be broken to pieces. The calf of Samaria is a false God. The law of Divine retribution is the punishment for sin being often a greater facility in sinning. Wind expresses what is empty and fruitless. Israel is swallowed up, a vessel devoted to vilest uses or smashed up as worthless.

Israel is like a wild ass known for its lust and seeks strange lovers to its own shame. As for the purity of religion Israel from the beginning had only one altar where the whole nation came together to worship. There was no alternate place of worship. But now she has multiplied altars. The worship of God was degraded into the sensuous — approaching Baal-worship. What they like to eat themselves they sacrifice. But these acts of will worship are not acceptable to God.

The proliferation of temples by Israel and the increase of fenced cities by Judah would end up in their destruction. Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it (Psalm 127). The sign of old-age are upon him. He does not know his approaching death. Like a silly dove Israel while paying homage to the Assyrian power was also making alliance with Egypt the other super power. The result of this double-dealing was disaster from the hand of God.

I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the LORD accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof. (Hosea 8:12-16)

Chapter IX

God Uses Assyria As His Chastisement Instrument

It is now harvest time — the period of annual vintage festivals. The corn is being reaped, the wine-press is trodden and the vats are overflowing. But behind the bright picture there looms to the prophets' gaze a sombre background. This and the following two chapters which form a connected whole, contains another denunciation of the abominations of idolatrous Israel.

Foreseeing an Assyrian invasion the prophet predicts the fleeing of many from Ephraim to Egypt. Others would be taken to Assyria as POWs. There their sacrifices will not be pleasing to Him. It will be rather the eating of bread of sorrow, i.e. funeral food which defiles for seven days those who partake of it. Egypt and Memphis would be refugee centres of the Ephramites when Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

In the days of Israel's visitation, the prophets were become crazed by the persecutions to which they were subjected. The watchman of Ephraim was a true prophet, but the ordinary prophet was a professional and false one. He was a fowler's snare in all his ways and hatred in the house of his God. The morality of the people had sunken to the sordid depths of Gibeah (Judges 19). Therefore God will visit their sins.

When Israel was in the Wilderness God treasured them like grapes in the desert and the first-ripe figs. But they turned from Him

when tempted by the Moabitish women at Baal-peor. This was a great national shame.

As for Ephraim her glory is departed like a bird flown away. She will have no child birth and if they have children they will be killed. In more vivid language on God's curse of Ephraim's fertility, God will give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Gilgal is one of Israel's centres of idolatrous worship. For that I hated them.

All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations. (verses 15-17)

Chapter X

Unrepentant Samaria Will Be Judged

Although Israel is a vine that yields luxuriantly she is called “empty” because her grapes are sour. The more she becomes great in national wealth and military power the more she builds altars to Baal and other gods. Images abound at every street corner! Misapprehending the cause of their temporal prosperity and wilfully ignoring Jehovah’s forbearance, they attributed their prosperity to Baal. This treacherous spirit is the same as that of the rebellious Jews that took refuge in Egypt. When Jeremiah chided them for their idolatry in a foreign land and not turning back to Jehovah they answered their prophet saying, “But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil” (Jeremiah 44:17).

As their heart is divided and commit perjury, they shall suffer punishment. He shall break down their altars, and destroy their images. As for asking what will he do for us? The prophet having seen a succession of Israelite kings overthrown predicts yet another time of anarchy. Divine judgments shall come not as a harvest but as poisonous plants sprouting in the ridges of the fields.

The inhabitants of Samaria will fear because of the calves of Beth-aven. Those whom they worship will be carried to Assyria for a

present to King Jareb. Neither king nor priest nor idols could protect them. In fear they wish the mountains will cover them and hide them. Israel's problem is not new. It is traced to the days of Gibeah when it broke out into gross sexual sin. This resulted in a civil war between all Israel and Benjamin. Israel won and Gibeah and Benjamin were punished.

But now it is Israel's turn to be punished. Israel has set up two golden calves to be worshipped at Bethel in the South and Dan in the North. Judgment must fall on Israel for the idolatrous worship.

Israel is a trained heifer in treading out the corn. This is a pleasant task because the animal can eat as she works (Deuteronomy 25:4). But now God will send her to hard work in the field and have a rider upon her back (she will serve Assyria). Hard times are coming. The same judgment will come to Judah through 130 years after.

Using this figure of speech the prophet concludes his sermon:

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Betharbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children. So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off. (Hosea 10:12-15)

Chapter XI

Out Of Egypt Did I Call Out My Son

Up to this point the prophet's message to Israel is one of condemnation, but henceforth consolation. In Chinese idiom it is tasting increasing sweetness like munching a sugar-cane.

The prophet looks back to God's saving act in plucking Israel (when she was young) out of Egypt, because God loved her. This verse is quoted by Matthew as reflective of God's love for His only begotten son in that He also called Him back from Egypt to Israel. The Lord Jesus who is born a Jew is identifying Himself with the people Israel.

Now, despite Israel's offering sacrifices and incense to the gods of Baal, God still loves her and heals her, as a father. Nevertheless they will be taken captive to Assyria, though they would choose rather to go to Egypt. Their exile into Assyria is the result of their refusing to return to their God. "So the sword shall abide on their cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels." For this is God's chastisement on a backsliding people.

In spite of the fact that they deserve it, God as a Father is slow to hand over His child to punishment. God treats Israel as He did to Admah and Zeboim, two cities linked to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Though they are guilty of the same sins, Jehovah is reticent to give them the same punishment. Jehovah's heart is in tension because of the covenant He made with Israel.

Though His judgment against Israel shall be severe, it will not obliterate them, for God will keep His covenant with them. This leads us to the days of the Millennium.

When He comes He will roar like a lion against Israel's enemies and those dispersed in the war shall return. Those dispersed to the south will return as will those from the north and east.

As for now Israel is still very sinful and deceitful. Judah by comparison is in God's favour.

Chapter XII

Political Adultery, Religious Adultery, Commercial Adultery

This refers to the idols Ephraim worships which Jeremiah puts it to them: “The stock is a doctrine of vanities” (Jeremiah 10:8). Serving idols is like feeding on wind and after the east wind, a devastating wind from the eastern desert. Politically, Ephraim looks not up to God but to Assyria and by a balancing act also to Egypt. Judah, the Southern Kingdom will also be judged with Ephraim, through 130 years later.

Apostate Israel is now commanded to recall her ancestry. Jacob was the rock from whence she was hewn (Isaiah 51:1). Jacob means “grab.” From his Mother’s womb he had laid hold on the heel of his brother Esau. He had strength to wrestle with God. He won by his strong supplication to the Angel who came to him in the night at Peniel. He first met his God at Bethel on his outgoing journey to Harran. In turning back to God, Israel is to keep mercy and judgment and wait on God continually.

Instead they not only go after false gods but they also practise cheating in trading, “the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.” In their ill-gotten gains they became blind to their profiteering. They think they were immune from investigation. They failed to see that God’s tolerance of them was to bring them to repentance (Romans 2:4).

In extending His grace to them Jehovah sent prophets to them with multiplied “visions and similitudes.” But they seek after falsehoods through Israel at Gilead on the east and Gilgal on the west of the River Jordan. Once again Israel is reminded of the example of their ancestor, how he kept to the terms of contract in getting a wife. He lived up to his word. She is reminded of Moses whom God sent to save them from Egypt and preserve them.

Instead of being grateful to God for all His mercies, Israel in the days of Hosea “provoked Him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.”

Chapter XIII

Review Of Israel's Rebellion

There was a time when Ephraim was a power to be reckoned with. When she gave herself to Baal under Ahab, she “died.” She backslided more and more by making idols and devotees would kiss the calves they worshipped. They lost all moral strength. They were as light as the morning cloud and early dew. They were like chaff and smoke.

Jehovah was their God since He delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. Israel knew no other God nor any other Saviour but Himself. God took special care of them in the wilderness. They were fed, the sheep of His pasture. When fully fed, instead of remembering Him, they forgot His kindness.

In judgment of their ingratitude (which I would call the twin sister of treachery) God would be a lion, leopard, bear and a wild beast. As these ferocious beasts He would tear them and devour them. In fact Israel will destroy herself and God is still their help. Nevertheless the nation’s disobedience will not frustrate God’s saving plan, for he is their king. The “judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes” refer to the time of Samuel (I Samuel 8:4-9). Their sin was not in their desiring a king, but in the kind of king they wanted. They desired a king like the Gentiles, no more looking to God for salvation.

God did give them a king in Saul. He was a stubborn and rebellious king, so God deposed him. This sin of Ephraim is bound

up and hid. But it will be revealed like the sudden pain that grips a woman at childbirth. Israel should repent. Failure to do so would land her in future sorrow and destruction.

God would deliver them from the grave and death if Israel would only repent. Though Israel seems to prosper God will send an east wind, that is Assyria, to destroy them. “Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up” (verse 16).

Chapter XIV

Repentance Is The Word!

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

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.

Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein. (Hosea 14)

Chapter 14 are the words of the truly penitent. It is an exhortation to every wayward child of God. It is self-explanatory. Asshur is Assyria, the super power that threatened Israel in the days of Jeroboam II and of the kings after him till Samaria was taken and the people gone into exile in 722 B.C. The calves of our lips are to be taken metaphorically, i.e. the product of our lips, that is praise.

2. Joel

Introduction

This Prophecy on “the Day of the Lord,” emphasised five times (1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14), also called “Prophecy of Pentecost” (Acts 2:16-21), is an urgent message on repentance. It is written by Joel the son of Pethuel. Joel is made up of two Hebrew words, *Jehovah* and *Elohim* = Jehovah is God.

As Joel does not describe himself more than he is his father’s son, dating his authorship can only be conjecture. Modern critics would put his writing at 500 B.C. after the Babylonian captivity. Conservative scholars, however, have maintained a very early date, some time after Elijah and Elisha, around 836 B.C. This makes him contemporary with Hosea and Amos. While these two prophets ministered to the Northern Kingdom, Joel would minister to the South. He is thought to be the first writing prophet in Judah. The place where he spoke his message is most likely Jerusalem, crying out from the Temple courts. The purpose of his prophecy is to turn back the nation to God in preparation of the coming of the great Day of the Lord. It is a most timely message to us living at the conclusion of the end times.

Chapter I

The Locust Plague In Joel's Time

Joel has a most urgent message to the nation. His calling on the elders to take note means he has something to tell them that was never heard before. It is to be told to all inhabitants of the Lord and to be retold to the children and their children. It is the message of the locust plague which is the awful omen of the terrible Day of the Lord to come.

The locust plague devours the whole land. It turns a green and lustrous country into a brown and bald wilderness. Such a locust disaster is one of the Ten Plagues rained on Egypt. Moses prophesied God would repeat to punish Israel with this Egyptian plague if they rebelled against Him (Deuteronomy 28:38, 42).

This chapter does not tell of four insect plagues, but rather the development of a single type of insect, the locust, from its birth to full maturity. These four stages of the locust's development are sometimes taken to refer to Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome in their domination of Judah.

The locust plague first of all affects the drunkards who usually are drowned out by wine, but now that the vines are amongst the first to be destroyed, they will wake up. Calvin says that when a man is well off he will turn to himself away from God. It is when he is severely afflicted that he will look up to Him. Note that verses 6 and 7 tell of the vine being eaten white or being stripped bare. Being laid bare is it not high time for the nation to mourn in repentance, in

sackcloth and ashes like a virgin on wedding day to be greeted by the groom's sudden death? What greater calamity can be compared to this? The plague is so severe that even the meat (food) offering and the drink offering run out because of short supply. Needless to say the farmers and vinedressers are left high and dry with no produce to work on. The mood of a great depression (slump) paralyses the whole land. It is like the great Depression of 1929-30 that brought the rubber planting business in Malaysia to a complete standstill, and people literally were subsisting on a starvation diet. The rubber tappers in my father's rubber estate trapped rats to supplement their meagre rations.

Would the people seek God now in repentance? At such a time, according to the call of the prophet, the Pastor should call his congregation to fasting and searching of heart (Calvin). As for Joel he sees the locust plague as an adumbration of the great Day of the Lord coming to judge the earth. The only way out of total destruction is repentance.

Chapter II

The Day Of The Lord

In the omen of the locust plague, heralding worse things to come, the watchman of Zion must blow the trumpet to wake and warn of the impending holocaust. For the Day of the Lord brings in darkness, clouds of thick darkness. This breaks forth into fire that devours all along its path, baked up by a supporting flame. What was once a Garden of Eden is now an empty waste.

This invasion of the end time forces of destruction is likened to horses and chariots, leaping in unison in full battle array. Their power is so great that the earth quakes before them. The sun and moon are darkened, and the stars become blotted out. Who can face this terror of the Day of the Lord? The only way out is to call the whole nation to repentance.

When we turn to God, He will pity us His children. He will restore us from the “reproach of the heathen” (verse 19). He will deliver the nation from the invading “northern army” and send them to a barren land eastwards with their backs to the Mediterranean.

In restoring His people He will regulate the seasonal rains to their fullness, and “restore the years that the locusts hath eaten” (verse 25). Today Israel is being blessed with plentiful harvests because of the fullness of seasonal rains.

Now comes the famous passage that was quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, verses 28-32. With the coming of Pentecost, God will cause his servants and handmaidens to prophesy. Preaching the

Gospel to the heathens and revivalistic preaching to the slumbering Church is of utmost importance. We may not agree with charismatic churches but they have a zeal that we lack. These are the days that will lead to the climax of that great and terrible Day of the Lord when the powers of heaven will be shaken (Luke 21:26).

Chapter III

“After Darkness Light”

This phrase is the translation of “*Post Tenebras Lux*,” a watchword of the 16th Century Reformation. This climaxing chapter tells of the horrible duration of total carnage before Israel is divinely delivered.

Here is described the Battle that settles all scores, viz., The Battle of Armageddon. All the nations that attack Jerusalem will be brought down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat means “God will judge.” Some people think this is the Valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

The basis upon which these enemies of Israel will be judged is their treatment of God’s people. They have scattered the Jews to the ends of the earth. They have sold the young as slaves to the Greeks.

The enemies mentioned here are Tyre and Zidon and the coastal people, the Philistines. They have robbed God of His silver and gold. In recompense God will sell their sons and daughters to the Sabeans.

Now God taunts His enemies to fight Him. Let these mobilise their forces and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The punishment will be total like a harvest-reaping and the gathering of grapes for the winepress. The Valley of Decision is synonymous with the Valley of Jehoshaphat or Judgment. This will be the climax of the Tribulation period that leads to the pouring out of the bowls of God’s wrath (Revelation 16). “Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto

the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire” (Psalm 46:8-9).

So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion. (Joel 3:17-21)

This climaxing paragraph leads us to the golden millennium of Christ’s rule on earth with Jerusalem as the earth’s capital.

3. Amos

Introduction

The author of this Prophecy is Amos. God calls him to be a prophet to Israel and the surrounding nations to chide them each one for their sins.

Amos was a country boy. He was a shepherd of Tekoa, a village in Judah, south of Bethlehem. His credentials: “Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel” (7:14-15). A rustic like Amos called of the Lord is better than a high nosed theologian who serves in the Church as a professional.

The sycamore fruit was a fig of low quality eaten by the poorest of the people. What was there for Amos to talk about of himself, a herdman and collector of a lowly fruit? In the hands of the Almighty he became a mighty preacher, delivering thundering messages against apostate Israel and the neighbouring countries.

The date of writing of this book is “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (1:1). This makes Amos a contemporary with Hosea, Isaiah and Jonah. His prophecy was delivered across the border at Bethel, the seat of gold-calf worship instituted by Jeroboam I. He was opposed by the priest of Bethel Amaziah (7:10ff). For resisting the Word of God, Amaziah and his children died and his wife became a harlot — what a warning to false leaders of the Church!

Chapter I

Judgment On The Surrounding Nations

As he begins to deliver God's message of judgment, he works it to a grand climax that totally demolishes Israel.

First he starts with the total heathens in his line of attack — Damascus, Syria, Gaza, and Tyre. From there he tackles Edom, Ammon and Moab, blood nations and semi-heathen. Finally he targets Judah the Southern Kingdom and then zeroes in on the bull's eye, Israel.

Damascus is the capital of Syria. By using the formula, for three transgressions and for four, it is a rhetorical way of piling up the offences committed by the accused. If three transgressions fill the cup, the fourth one causes it to overflow. Is not Syria then ripe for judgment? The crimes of Hazael and his son Benhadad against Israel in the reigns of Jehu and Jehoahaz (II Kings 10:32-33; 13:3-7) cannot be erased, but by a corresponding consuming fire. The plain of Aven (vale of vanity) was the beautiful stretch of land between Damascus and Lebanon, where sun worship flourished. The house of Eden refers to Beth-Eden, which is near Haran. Kir is located in Armenia in today's Republic of Georgia on the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

Though this prophecy is addressed to Gaza, the inclusion of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and the remnant of the Philistines relates to the whole land of the Philistines bordering on the Mediterranean.

All of Phoenicia is included in the judgment pronounced on Tyrus. They sold Judah into slavery to Edom, a more heinous crime than Philistine's in that Tyre had a friendly treaty with Israel under David and Solomon. The fire on the wall of Tyre was fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar's siege and conquest of Tyre.

In spite of their kinship Edom pursued his brother with the sword. Edom sought to exterminate his brother Judah. God's judgment resulted in Teman (five miles from Petra) becoming a Roman garrison, Bozrah (c.f. Genesis 36:11, 15).

Chapter II

Judgment On Surrounding Nations (continued)

Moab is the son of Lot and his first daughter. Edom is Jacob's twin elder brother. They are cousins. To burn the bones of the king of Edom into lime was an unbrotherly offence.

Kerioth is thought to be Moab's new capital city.

Judah's sin, like Israel, is the spurning of God's Law that was specifically delivered to them.

Israel's sin in selling the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes shows their insatiable greed and lust. The judges are bribed by even a pair of shoes. The sexual sins committed by brother, father and son on the same woman refers perhaps to their visiting the same prostitute. "They lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar." These are the outer garments given as a pledge. According to Moses, before sunset these must be returned to the poor that it could be used as covering against the cold of the night (Exodus 22:25-27). Those who had taken the garment in pledge not only refused to relent but used them themselves in the temples. They used the money they have extorted from the poor to drink wine — are they not condemned?

God's people had forgotten how He helped them by destroying the original inhabitants of the Amorites or Canaanites. God had also raised up Nazarites from among their young men to consecrate their service to the Lord. But they tempted the Nazarites to drink wine and

break their vows to the Lord. They resisted the preaching of the prophets.

As God is also oppressed by Israel's sins, He will punish them by taking away the ability to fight or run, so that the brave of the brave will flee away naked.

Chapter III

Message Of Condemnation A

This message is directed not only to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but also to the South.

With a set of seven questions to illustrate the righteousness of God's judgment on His wayward people He shows how cause must result in effect.

1. Can two walk together except they be agreed?
Two men cannot walk together (effect) except they have previously agreed (cause).
2. Will a lion roar in the forest (effect) when he has no prey? (cause)
3. Will a young lion cry out of his den (effect) if he has taken nothing? (cause)
4. Can a bird fall in a snare upon earth (effect) where no gin is for him? (cause)
5. Shall one take up a snare from the earth (effect) and have nothing at all? (cause)
6. Shall the trumpet be blown in the city (cause), and the people not be afraid? (effect)
7. Shall there be evil in a city (effect) and the Lord hath not done it? (cause).

Verse 8 continues the cause and effect imagery: The lion hath roared (cause), who will not fear (effect).

The Lord God hath spoken (cause) who can but prophesy? (effect). So when God punishes His wayward people (effect) it is the result of their rebellion (cause).

Ashdod is representative of all Philistia and together with all Egypt have invited Samaria to see what evil is practised there. Even these heathen countries will be appalled.

Verse 11. The adversary here is the super power of Assyria who laid siege to Samaria for three years.

Yet as two legs and an ear are salvaged from the mouth of the lion from a whole sheep it has devoured, according to the law of the remnant, a few of Israel will be saved “in the corner of a bed” and “in a couch” while in their self-indulgence. Apparently many from northern Israel had settled in Damascus in the heyday of Jeroboam II’s rule. But now they are caught in the Assyria invasion.

God will smite specially the altars to the gold-calf erected by Jeroboam I at Bethel.

Chapter IV

Message Of Condemnation B

This message begins with an indictment against the high society of Samaritan women, the (fat) cows of Bashan. Bashan is located east of the Jordan River, and the Sea of Galilee. Living in luxurious wantonness, these “kine of Bashan” can only oppress the poor and get drunk with their menfolk. Hence God will take them away with hooks and their posterity with fish hooks. They will be caught as it were by fishermen.

“And ye shall cast them into the palace.” In the attempt to escape the women of Samaria would flee through the breaches in the wall, seeking refuge on higher ground, that give temporary resting place, but not for long.

Ironically the prophet invites them to Bethel their religious centre, but only to transgress and to Gilgal another centre, the more. To what purpose are sacrifices and tithes, thankofferings and freewill offerings given? Only to add to the burden of sin in their wanton heart.

God’s response to a rebellious people, committing spiritual adultery in the worship of idols of all kinds can only be the punishments listed hereat.

Chapter V

Lamentations Over Israel

In the light of condemnations pronounced in the preceding chapter, this lamentation or funeral dirge directed at Israel is appropriate. Israel is submerged under the Assyrian invasion, yet she has hope by turning to their God.

For their salvation, let Israel go not to Bethel and Gilgal, centres of idol worship, nor Beersheba in Judah, now also a centre of idol worship. A second call is made to return to Jehovah for their salvation. The house of Joseph has two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, in Israel, and Ephraim became the premier tribe. “Ye who turn judgment into wormwood are the unrighteous judges.”

Israel is called to seek the God who created the stars — Pleiades (the seven stars) and Orion, which are also mentioned in Job 9:9; 38:31. He rules the day and night. He controls the sea. He is the God of Providence, the Governor of the universe. Jehovah is His Name.

The prophet who denounces the unjust ruling from the judge’s seat in the city gate is abhorred! By oppressing the poor to enrich themselves they have built stone houses, a picture of their ill-gotten gains, but they will not live in them. They will not eat their own grapes, etc., etc. The oppression is so overwhelming that the wise can only keep their mouths shut.

After a last call to repentance and foreseeing there will be more the prophet ends this lamentation with sorrow and wailing to the

rebellious house of Israel. In that day of judgment no one will escape.

All the sacrifices made to the Lord will be despised when their fellow men are mistreated. Moloch and Chiun are more idols added to their pantheon of gods to provoke Jehovah who will cast them off in captivity beyond Damascus.

Chapter VI

Message Of Condemnation C

The fourth condemnation message is addressed both to Zion (Jerusalem) and Samaria (Israel).

Calneh was built on the Tigris River by Nimrod in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:10). Hamath, located on the Orontes River, was one of the cities of Syria. Gath was in Philistia. These cities are mentioned to show up to Israel and Judah how God had blessed them more than the Gentile nations. These Gentile nations were judged who were the less privileged. Will God not the more deal with His own people?

Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed. (verses 3-7)

The punishment of Israel will be so great that if there are ten men in the house, not one will be able to escape. So many will die that burying them will be difficult. To solve the problem cremation will be carried out. The remnants will not dare to mention the name of the Lord.

The punishment will extend to both rich and poor. For their waywardness and boastfulness God will raise up a nation (Assyria) that will devastate them from Hemath in the north to the river in the south.

Chapter VII

Amos, Intercessor And Contender

Verses 1 to 3 is a vision of locusts given to the prophet. Israel had two mowings of grass to make hay. The first mowing was paid to the king as tribute, and the second was retained for the people. After the first mowing the locusts began to grow and eat up the remaining grass. This would leave nothing for the people. The prophet interceded for the people, and the Lord relented. The impending locust plague was averted.

Verses 4 to 6 is a vision of impending judgment by fire, or drought, to consume even waters of the ocean and all available land. By the prophet's intercession this plague is also averted.

Verses 7 to 17 is a vision of the Plumb Line. This means judgment must come. The plumb line is to measure works of construction. Measured by God's plumb line or strict laws Israel has failed miserably. All the high places and idols will be destroyed and the king Jeroboam II will be chased by the sword.

The rest of the chapter is biographical and self-explanatory. There is a warning to false prophets who withstand the Lord. Punishment to them and their families can be very severe, even to death.

Chapter VIII

Message Of Basket Of Summer Fruit

This chapter begins with the vision of a basket of summer fruit. That is to say Israel, like the plucked summer fruit, is ripe for judgment.

What are the sins for which Israel will be punished.

1. Swallowing up the poor, the big fish eating the small fish.
2. Desecration of the Sabbath.
3. Falsifying measures and balances, making “the ephah small and the shekel great,” selling lesser quantity and charging more payment.
4. Charging a price on the refuse of the wheat which is usually given to the poor.

For all these crimes the land will be shaken under God’s judgment, as in an earthquake and by a flood. That the sun will be darkened at noon refers to what Jesus says, the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Their songs will be turned into lamentations.

Greater judgment will be in the spiritual when there will be a famine of hearing the Word of God. It will be difficult to hear a good sermon. In contrast, idolatry will be multiplied from Dan and Beersheba, i.e. even to the southern ends of Judah. Is this not reflected in Christendom today, especially in the western nations?

Chapter IX

Final Message Of Israel's Dispersion And Restoration

This altar upon which the Lord is standing is not the true one in Jerusalem but the counterfeit erected by Jeroboam I at Bethel. The Lord Himself executes judgment on the temple of the gold-calf worship. This judgment of the temple at Bethel falls on the heads of the worshippers. No one will escape. Whatever their device, wherever they go, there will no one be able to get away from the Lord. Even in captivity, the sword will not depart from them. They would be followed by a flood and shall be drowned as by the flood of Egypt. The God of creation and providence, Jehovah is His Name.

Jehovah has not only brought Israel out of Egypt, but also the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete?) to the mainland seacoast of Palestine. And the Syrians from Kir to their present place in Damascus. So can Jehovah utterly destroy this sinful kingdom (Israel). I will sift the house of Israel among the nations, and kill the sinners who say the evil will not overtake us. For Jacob's sake, however, he will preserve those to be preserved.

In the day that God will visit Israel again he will restore the tabernacle of David, etc. This is quoted in Acts 15:16 by James in reference to the door of evangelism opened to the Gentiles.

Verses 13-15 looks to a bright future that leads to the Golden Millennium when Christ will rule on earth. Amen.

4. Obadiah

The Unconscionable Sin Of Betraying A Brother And Exulting In His Downfall

(A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. Proverbs 18:19)

Obadiah is the shortest Book in the Old Testament. It is written by one who wishes not to be known by other than that he is “Servant of the Lord.” Obadiah just means that. Such a spirit is like St. Paul’s, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (II Corinthians 4:5).

As little is known of the author so is the time and place of the writing of this prophecy. As a rule conservatives tend to date it early and critics date it late. We believe it to be an early date because it is placed early in the canon, after Amos, suggesting a pre-exilic origin.

The prophecy is about Edom’s destruction, though at the time of the prophetic utterance Edom was proud and secure. As for Judah, though the reverse was true and there was no love lost from his elder twin brother, the day would come when the tables would be turned.

The purpose of this prophecy is to pronounce God’s judgment upon Edom because of his unconscionable treatment of a blood relative against even the dictates of nature.

* * * * *

The prophet’s message to Edom comes in the form of a vision from the Lord. This is one method whereby God’s Word is made

known to man. In the case of Joseph it was by dream. As to Moses it was from mouth to mouth (Numbers 12).

This prophecy is for the people comprising the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. The enmity between the two brothers is traced to Genesis 27 in the stolen blessing. Throughout the centuries that followed, Jacob and Esau remained alienated, to say the least.

Edom having carved a kingdom for himself out of the rocks was proud of his impregnability. But God would bring down this pride. The present day ruins of Petra, the capital city, proves this. While thieves and robbers will take what they want, and grape gatherers will leave some behind, God's judgment will be total.

Moreover Edom's allies and friends will deceive him (in retribution) from God. Their wise men will be overtaken. The mighty will be dismayed. They will be destroyed. Teman was a city in Edom.

That Edom would be destroyed was due to his unnatural crime of violence to his twin brother. Edom treated Jacob the very opposite Jacob was commanded to treat Esau (Deuteronomy 23:7).

When Jacob was in trouble, instead of coming to his brother's relief he stood rather on the enemy's side. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13). "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished" (Proverbs 17:5). "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the Lord see it, and it displeaseth Him, and he turn away his wrath from him" (Proverbs 24:17,18).

The day of retribution would soon come. "As thou hast done, it shall be done to thee."

The drinking here refers to the drinking of God's wrath. The drinking of the heathen will be continually to the very last dregs of

the cup of wrath as contrasted with Judah, for deliverance will come upon Mount Zion.

As for Judah and Ephraim (Northern and Southern Kingdoms) they will be united against Esau and destroy him. Today Edom is extinct.

5. Jonah

Introduction

Jonah means “dove.” Of all Minor Prophets he is the best known. He is the hero of Sunday School children.

He is mentioned in II Kings 14:25 as the son of Amittai, hailing from Gath-hepher, a village near Nazareth. Jonah gave a prophecy which was fulfilled in the reign of Jeroboam II. His ministry is dated at the close of Elisha’s ministry. There is a Jewish legend that connects him with the son of the widow of Zeraphath whom Elijah resurrected, who later attended to the prophet in the wilderness.

Jonah is written in the third person. It was written after his successful mission to Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah is the Book of Acts in the Old Testament inasmuch as it is God’s Mission to a Gentile power. In this record is revealed God’s sovereignty over Jonah’s life, His mercy to the Gentile sailors and to the king and people of Assyria when they repent. It is literal history as vouched by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:39-40). His being swallowed by a big fish and vomitted out alive is a sign of the Resurrection of our Saviour. But the modernists and liberals teach otherwise. One American missionary bishop who taught me at Anglo-Chinese School was reported as saying in his sermon, “If you can believe the whale swallowed Jonah, then you can also believe Jonah swallowed the whale.” To him Jonah is a myth and a fairy tale.

Chapter I

The Runaway Prophet

Nineveh was the great capital city of Assyria the rising super power after Egypt, east of Israel.

Tarshish was Spain on the western end of the Mediterranean.

Joppa on the Mediterranean seacoast is modern day Jaffa, near Tel Aviv.

Jonah, fleeing from the Lord's commandment to him, bought a ticket on a ship bound for Tarshish. Thinking he was now escaped out of God's hand he went into a sweet slumber. But God sent a big gale that tossed the ship about so violently that it seemed to break.

While others were working hard to save the ship Jonah the sleeper was awakened. They cast lots to find out who was the culprit and the lot fell on Jonah. He was questioned thoroughly about his nationality and occupation. He confessed he was a Hebrew and a worshipper of the living true God and Creator. He was found out to be fleeing from Him. He repented of his sin and asked to be thrown into the sea to appease His God. Though the sailors rowed hard to bring the ship to land, it was of no avail.

As a God-fearing crew they did not throw Jonah overboard until they had sought the Lord for His mercies. Immediately the storm subsided. The crew feared the Lord the more when they felt a sudden calm and they sacrificed and made vows. God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and carry him in its belly three days and three

nights. The miracle of Jonah was not only in the timing of his being swallowed by the big fish but also in his being preserved alive in the fish's stomach. Ordinarily, he would have been digested and absorbed into the fish's system.

Chapter II

The Repentant Prophet

God preserved Jonah in the fish's belly from being digested as He protected Daniel from being eaten up in the Lion's Den, and the three Hebrew boys from the fire of Nebuchadnezzar's burning furnace. There's a chorus: "God can do anything, anything, anything, God can do anything but fail."

The prayer of Jonah in the fish's belly is the prayer of repentance. Without repentance there is no salvation. With salvation the erring prophet goes on to thanksgiving. The prophet though originating from Israel, keeps clear of the heretical religions of the Northern Kingdom such as the gold-calf worship of Bethel and the worship of Baal in Samaria. He looks to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (verse 7). "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)" (I Kings 8:38-39).

The description of his ordeal in the fish's belly is real life experience. There is no room for allegory about the Prophet's testimony, as modernist commentators allege or insinuate.

"Salvation is of the Lord" is often quoted by Calvin to originate in God and not in man. In the words "Beer-lahai-roi," "well of Him

who sees me” is Hagar’s acknowledgement that her salvation is also of the Lord. What comfort to us when faced with troubles and dangers in every vicissitude of life.

Chapter III

The Recommissioned Prophet

Nineveh now becomes Jonah's Destination, willingly after his traumatic experience in the fish's belly because of disobedience. Nineveh is described as an exceeding great city of three days' journey. "Twenty miles the prophet penetrates into the city. He has still finished only one third of his journey through it. . ." (Dean Stanley). How does this compare with the whole island of Singapore which is but 27 miles long and 14 miles wide?

When God thunders judgment on wicked people, there is hope of salvation when the people repent. It cannot be doubted that the message to Nineveh was so charged with power this time because God's instrument was now fully prepared. Jonah had seen his God and spoke as one on a life-and-death mission. Like the Apostle Paul who was struck blind by Christ, he could not speak henceforth but with the imperative of the heavenly vision. Every vessel that is to be used effectively for Christ must go through God's hammer and anvil, through fire and furnace. As the Chinese saying goes, "It takes a long time to make a great vessel."

Chapter IV

The Sulking Prophet

Instead of praising the Lord for the conversion of the Ninevites, Jonah became angry with God for their salvation. Jonah has not changed from his anti-Assyrian attitude.

Assyria for years had been the great and terrible conqueror of other countries. Fear and terror had spread everywhere as Assyria's armies had made conquest. Assyria's cruelty in these campaigns had become well known. Jonah no doubt believing such a country deserved only punishment and not gracious consideration just did not want to go there (Leon J. Wood).

It was better for him to die. Does this not reflect our short-breath tolerance of our enemies? For example, the hatred between the Jews and Arabs today is bone-deep. Even the Christian Arab cannot reconcile with his Israel counterpart. A Singapore pastor when preaching to a Christian Arab congregation must take care not to mention anything favourable to the Jews. This is my observation in our travels to the Holy Land. Only God in the quiet moments can speak to the two sides now at great odds.

Jonah's going out of the city reflects his unhappiness with the Ninevites. He made a booth for shelter against the sun. God came to his help to cause a gourd to sprout a covering over his head, and its growth must have been faster than bamboo shoots after the spring rains. Jonah praised his God. But to teach him a lesson God sent a worm to eat it that it withered. Jonah got angry again.

God said to Jonah, “Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” (verses 10-11). God loved the Ninevites as Jonah loved the gourd. Jonah replied not again. Jonah was silenced. Will the Christian Jews and Christian Arabs forgive one another? Can we forgive even enemies in our own Church?

6. Micah

Introduction

Micah is a small book compared with Isaiah. Hence, Isaiah together with Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel which are big books are called Major Prophets. The rest of the prophets from Hosea to Malachi, twelve in number, and being comparatively short, are called Minor Prophets. So Micah is one of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

Micah prophesied during the long years of Isaiah's ministry. Micah's ministry stretched through the reigns of the three Judean kings: Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. To get a more detailed picture of the evil times in which he lived, review the introduction to Isaiah the Gospel Prophet. While Isaiah prophesied to kings and ambassadors in the court at Jerusalem, Micah the peasant who hails from Moresheth in the southwestern countryside of Judah spoke to the common people. He complemented the work of the city prophet.

Micah means — Who is like JAH (Jehovah)?” With authority from His Majesty on High, Micah the humble country boy could thunder against the sins of the nation, beginning with corrupt princes, priests and prophets (3:9 -12). The most heinous social sin was the exploitation of the weak by the powerful (3:3). He sounded like Isaiah who attacked such abuses: “The princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them” (Isaiah 1:23).

Though Micah was of a smaller calibre to Isaiah, he is immortalised by his famous prediction of Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem, David's City royal. Not Nazareth as was supposed by certain Jews of Jesus' day (John 7:40-43). Even to this day Christians are called by Jews *Notsuri*, i.e. of the sect of the Nazarene. So has a professor of history of the University of Singapore thought the Messiah was born in Nazareth until corrected by a deacon of Life B-P Church!

Micah's fearless denunciation of Judah's sins before King Hezekiah and the good king's submission to God's Word provided a precedent against the Jewish ecclesiastical leaders who tried to put Jeremiah to death (Jeremiah 26:18,19) during the last days of Jerusalem. Micah's forthright testimony against sin in high places given a century before did not lose its power in Jeremiah's day, nor will it ever. How do we stand for the Truth?

A third quotation of Micah's words is by none other than our Lord when He commissioned His disciples (7:6), warning them of traitors from within one's own house. This emphasises the greater bond of fellowship of the spiritual over the carnal.

Micah looks beyond the dark clouds of his day to that Day when the world would be ruled by the Prince of Peace from Jerusalem, when "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks ... neither shall they learn war anymore" (Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4 almost word for word). Micah therefore confirms Isaiah's message on a golden millennium to come. Micah is a book for today especially in the light of Christ's soon Return to bring salvation and peace to this war-torn earth. Amen.

Outline Of Micah

1. The Superscription (1:1)
2. Message Of Doom To Samaria (1:2-8)
3. Message Of Doom To Jerusalem (1:9-16)
4. Indictment And Deliverance (2:1-13)

5. Professional Princes, Priests And Prophets (3:1-12)
6. A Golden Age To Come After The Babylonian Captivity (4:1-13)
7. The Advent Of The King Of Kings (5:1-15)
8. Repentance Prerequisite To Restoration (6:1 - 7:10)
9. The Restoration (7:11-20)

Chapter I

The Superscription (1:1)

Superscription means that which is written above or on the outside. By this superscription to the messages the prophet has verbally delivered, which he now puts to writing, Micah gives us a clear picture of his person, his ministry, and the times in which he lived.

Micah calls himself the Morasthite. That is, he comes from the town of Moresheth in the southwestern part of Judah near the border to the Philistine territory. It is also called Moresheth-gath to pinpoint its location as near to Gath, a Philistine city. Can you find it on the map? As Moresheth-gath is mentioned but once in the Bible, in Micah alone, it must be an insignificant place. But God is no respecter of places, nor of persons. God can use you even if you come from the jungles of Borneo.

“In the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” circumscribes Micah’s ministry within the longer one of Isaiah, whose ministry preceded Micah’s by one king, viz., Uzziah.

We can be certain that he delivered his message in Samaria before the fall of this capital city of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel, 722 B.C.

We are strengthened by Micah’s boldness to speak to the highest authorities in both Samaria and Jerusalem. If he a nobody from some country farm had courage, under God, to testify to governors and kings, to withstand the hierarchy of false priests and prophets, let us

be strong in our witness even to the leaders of our nation. There is a ministry to the poor, the common people. There is also a ministry to the rich and the powerful. Before God they are the same, of a lost mankind.

This reminds us of the Divine Commission to the apostle Paul: “For he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:15,16).

Our Lord had earlier warned the disciples: “And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” (Matthew 10:18,22).

Message Of Doom To Samaria (1:2-8)

Though Micah belongs to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, he has a message from the Lord to Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He is so indignant at what is going on in Samaria that he calls to earth and heaven to witness against them. He calls upon the Lord God Himself who will pour out His pent-up wrath on a hypocritical nation. God will send, says the prophet, such terrible punishment as will leave the land utterly desolate. The description of the coming destruction is that of an earthquake, of a volcano and avalanche. (verse 4).

Why such a holocaust? Israel is judged for her sin of apostasy from her monotheistic faith. Instead of worshipping Jehovah, the living and true God, Samaria has become a den for all kinds of graven images and idols. The importation of Baalism into Samaria since Ahab’s reign has persisted like a cancerous growth to Micah’s day. Neither can Judah escape this indictment. So Jerusalem gets a side-jab from the prophet at this point as well.

Idolatry is spiritual harlotry (verse 7). Judgment on these idols is sure to come in the pending Assyrian invasion. These idols unable to

save their worshippers, much less themselves, will be taken by the Assyrian king Sargon. He says, “Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?” (Isaiah 10:11). The destruction of Samaria is further described as a heap of ruins (verse 6), though Jerusalem was spared until 150 years later.

Today, we might not have idols in the Protestant Churches (though there are plenty in the Roman Catholic Church), yet we are exhorted to keep ourselves from idols (I John 5:21). Covetousness, says the Apostle Paul, is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). It also has an image, and it is the \$ sign. A Church that looks to riches, and not the Lord God, commits idolatry.

In the light of the impending Assyrian invasion the prophet sees himself “stripped and naked”, like a mourning refugee or captive (of Isaiah 20:2-4), but will his warning be seriously taken by his hearers? “But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5).

So, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

Message Of Doom To Jerusalem (1:9-16)

Having denounced Samaria in the strongest possible terms, Micah’s prophescope now swings over to Judah and its capital city Jerusalem. But the invasion of Judah described here does not coincide with the Assyrian. It is something yet future. It took place 150 years later under the sway of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian hordes.

In this prophecy of a latter time, the prophet sees twelve Judean cities and townships in the vicinity of his home town, Moresheth, taken. A good number of these townships cannot be found on the map. Suffice us to identify the better known ones such as Gath and Lachish.

“Declare it not at Gath, weep not at all” (verse 10) is lament after David’s mourning of King Saul (II Samuel 1:20), lest the Philistine enemies of Judah rejoice. As to Lachish, it is the most important of the cities enumerated. It was fortified by Rehoboam and was sought as a refuge by Amaziah from the conspiracy formed against him in Jerusalem. After the capture of its Holy City by Nebuchadnezzar, Lachish alone remained (with Azekah) of the defenced cities of Judah. It appears from its position as a border city to have been the channel for the introducing into the kingdom of Judah the idolatry set up by Jeroboam in Israel (Ellicott).

Now, on the names of each of these towns there is a word-play, for example, Aphrah (verse 10) rhymes with the Hebrew word *aphar* = dust. So to the people of Aphrah comes the prophet’s taunt to roll in the *aphar* (dust). Then for Achzib there is the Hebrew word *achzab* = deceptive. So the people of Achzib are denounced to be a lie to the kings of Israel. By way of local illustration, Singapore’s name was changed to *Syonan* during the Japanese occupation of World War II. As Singaporeans under the Japanese were restricted in their movements, we called Singapore a Bird Cage, since *Syonan* rhymes with *Chiolang*, which means Bird Cage in the Teochew dialect.

It is not necessary for us to go into the word-play in each name of the twelve towns. It is enough to know that such word-play is a form of effective rhetoric in the prophet’s message.

The concluding verse (16) sees Judah going finally into captivity, naked like the bald head of vultures.

Chapter II

Indictment And Deliverance

Micah having denounced both Samaria and Jerusalem for their idolatries now proceeds to indict them on other counts. To indict is to charge with crime formally or in writing. The crimes are exposed here for our admonition.

1. Plotting and conspiracy night and day (verse 1).
2. Encroachment by force and fraud (verse 2).

This reminds of our Lord's condemnation of the Jews in His day for devouring widows' houses and making long prayers to cover up (Mark 12:40).

To these devourers of the weak God answers with poetic justice. When the Assyrian captors come into the land will they not do the same to these wicked landlords who have swallowed up others? When they come there will be no measuring of area or payment of money (verse 5). It will be a day of brutality over the brutal.

In verses 6 and 7 the scornful reply to the Prophet's threat: "Don't prate to us with such idle talk. We will not be embarrassed. Jehovah won't be so impatient to do such things. Has He not promised to deal with Israel graciously, whose ways are upright?"

Micah counters: "You strip the garments off the back of unsuspecting peaceful wayfarers like taking booty in war. You drive women away from their children. For a tiny thing you exact an

exorbitant pledge” (verses 8-10). Such demands are like the Shylockian pound of flesh (Shakespeare).

What a contrast is Micah’s message with the false prophet’s talk of wine and strong drink. Can a drunkard speak God’s Word?

Despite the condemnations, the prophet sees a day when God the Good Shepherd will gather His children like the sheep of Bozrah (a sheep centre). The Messiah in the role of “the Breaker” (that butts open the door) will demolish every obstacle that the sheep might follow through. Jehovah will go before His flock to lead them to peace. What grace, what mercy, that cannot be manifested but by a loving Father. So does He deal with His wayward Church today.

Chapter III

Professional Princes, Priests And Prophets

Micah's indictment which begins with powerful landlords grasping lands and houses (2:2) and leading on to peeling garments off the backs of visitors to the land (2:8) now climaxes with the flesh of the people being eaten (verses 3,5). Here we see the law of the jungle being enacted dripping red by tooth and claw. Who are these beasts of prey that eat up God's people?

First on the list are the false prophets. A false prophet need not be one that teaches heresy. A professional prophet, whose God is his belly (Philippians 3:19) and says Calvin, "whose religion is his kitchen", is also a false prophet. We find plenty of them in Micah's day, in St. Paul's day and in our day. Upon such prophets or preachers in our day, God sends darkness while it should be day. "Ye shall not have a vision" (verse 6) and they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God" (verse 7). No wonder there is no power from many a pulpit today. The reason behind is that gluttonous eating and drinking has brought drowsiness and drunkenness. As for Micah, he can testify of that pent-up divine power in him that cannot be contained. He must release it against the transgressions of the heads of the house of Jacob.

Next on the line are the princes who take bribes and the priests who will not perform their duties until they get paid. Similarly, the prophets "divine for money" (verse 11). Hypocritically they claim the Lord to be among them. They rely on a make-believe security. They are victims of their own deception.

For the sins of the leaders of Israel, yea, even of Zion (Judah) retribution must come. The land will be devastated and deserted through the ravages of war. Let every Christian nation take note. Let Christians pray for their Government. “For kings and all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:2). Amen.

Chapter IV

A Golden Age To Come After The Babylonian Captivity

One characteristic of Old Testament prophecy is that the prophet, while lamenting over the evils of his day, would invariably look forward to that day when restoration should come to this sin-cursed earth. Of particular prominence are the glowing terms by which that Golden Age is described in Micah. Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4 almost word for word. Micah's description transcends even that in Isaiah with verse 4: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it". This verse is reflective of the zenith of prosperity attained by Israel in the earlier part of Solomon's reign, which was a foreshadowing of the Greater Solomon in His millennial rule. Observes *New Bible Commentary*: "This indicates that the final world order will not be any kind of socialist or Marxist state ownership of all property, but every man will remain undisturbed in the enjoyment of his own personal property" (p. 756).

Before the Golden Age comes, Israel must go through many sufferings, even into exile after exile, when the Lord will come to their rescue and be their King. Before the final regathering, however, Judah must be taken into captivity by the Babylonians (verse 10).

The prophet leaps forward into the distant future again where he sees many nations gathered against Mount Zion. God who is Israel's secret defence will equip Israel with "iron horns" and "brass (bronze)

hoofs” (verse 13), with such powerful offensive and defensive weapons that will repel their invaders. The many wars Israel has won against her enemies since her independence 1948 are progressive fulfilments of this divine guarantee.

In view of the fact that regathered Israel today is fast fulfilling the Messianic prophecies, do you not realise how momentous are the days in which we live? The coming of the Messiah, even our Saviour Jesus Christ, is so near that it may take place any day now. Are you ready to meet Him? What have you done for His Kingdom?

Chapter V

By The Advent Of The King Of Kings

The prophet sees at the beginning of this chapter a national crisis in which the judge of Israel is smitten. Zedekiah the last Jewish king was thus humiliated by the Chaldeans (II Kings 24). Possibly verse 1 was fulfilled when Aristobulus the Jewish king was defeated by Pompey in 63 B.C.

In contrast with this vanquished king, a new Jewish Ruler is seen to arise from the little town of Bethlehem (ancient name, Ephrathah, c.f. Genesis 35:19; Ruth 1:1,2). This new ruler is no ordinary human being for His origin is from everlasting. Who is this other than Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem?

Since this Ruler is to save His own people, God will for the duration give up the Israelites for disciplinary judgments. The seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15 is to be born in travail (from the womb of the Virgin). (verse 3).

Christ will now defend His people against their enemies, Assyria being the representative in Micah's time. And Christ will defend His people with seven shepherds and eight principal men who are the heroes of faith in sacred and Church history. As far as Church history is concerned, we must count from the apostles, and those who are raised in successive ages should surely include leaders like Athanasius, Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, etc.

The end times appear in the remaining verses of this chapter. Assyria is symbolic of the area formerly held by the hostile world power. Nimrod was the first founder of Assyria.

The true believers of Israel will be a blessing to all mankind as refreshing showers upon the grass, as they disseminate the Gospel in that Day (verse 7).

The victory of Israel over the Gentile powers will not come from the arm of flesh. All their horses and chariots (armoured cars and tanks today) and fortifications will not count in their victory through the power of God (verses 8-11).

God's people will also be cleansed from all idols and heresy. The climax is reached when the wrath of God will be rained down upon a rebellious world, such as the world had never seen before.

Chapter VI & VII

Repentance Prerequisite To Restoration (6:1 - 7:10)

This long section calling for repentance from their many sins is addressed both to Judah and Israel. While the mention of Omri and Ahab (6:16) had direct reference to Israel, nevertheless, through Athaliah the daughter Baalism was spread also to the Southern Kingdom.

The mountains and hills have witnessed God's mercies upon His people from the days of the Exodus to the present. So they are called to testify as the prophet remonstrates with his generation. Their apostasy in yielding to the wiles of Balak and Balaam is one ancient sin mentioned here against them — idolatry and fornication.

Sacrifices costing much money and expense cannot take away sin without repentance. Interestingly verse 8 was chosen by Jimmy Carter at the time of his installation as President of the United States. And what is the use of giving to God on the one hand and cheating one's neighbour on the other (verses 11,12)? Therefore God will smite the hypocrites with famine and heavy losses in their land cultivation (Malachi 3:8-10).

On behalf of true Israel, Micah further confesses her sins before God, while there is a mourning for fruitlessness in their productivity efforts.

Morality and integrity have so degenerated as to disappear from the scene. Crime and intrigue run rampant. Princes and judges are corrupt, and he who bribes well is covered up. The best specimen in

the community is no better than a brier and a thorn hedge. The watchmen, i.e. the prophets, warn against their wickedness but in vain. No one can be trusted, not even one's wife. In the family there is strife between the older and younger generations so that a man's enemies are the men of his own house (7:6).

With this confession the prophet can look to God for salvation. Entrusting himself to God he can face his enemies and their ridicule.

The Restoration (7:11-20)

Micah's preaching is herewith concluded with another glimpse of the end-times that lead to Christ's millennial rule on earth.

In that day when the walls of God's Kingdom will be built, its boundary will also be extended: *decree* in KJV is translated *boundary* in NIV. (c.f. Isaiah 54:1-3). God's Kingdom on earth in Micah's time will be extended far beyond the borders of Palestine. Her widely scattered exiles from sea to sea will return. Converts from all over the world will join with believing Israel.

There will be a terrible destruction of the earth because of the deeds of her inhabitants. After the destruction of the rebellious world powers the Shepherd will take charge of Israel, now converted. (Israel today is in deep trouble because she still rejects Christ). Israel will have full enjoyment of her land, the good land of Bashan and Gilead as in olden days, and not be shut up in Carmel.

God will perform miracles to save Israel as He did in Moses's day. All the Gentile nations will be reduced to the dust before the manifestation of God's mighty power.

Remembering his name Micah, the prophet exults, "Who is a God like unto thee?" Not so much in respect of power, but rather of mercy. So the prophet declares his confidence in His compassion. God will "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). God will do this because He is a covenant-keeping God, who has sworn to Abraham and Jacob. This is the gospel of the Kingdom, the everlasting gospel unto the end of days. Amen.

7. Nahum

The Book of Nahum must be read in conjunction with the Book of Jonah. Both deal with the ancient super-power of Assyria, whose capital city was Nineveh.

The Book of Jonah tells the story of how as a result of the prophet's preaching, the Ninevites, from king to commoner, from man to beast, repented in sackcloth and ashes. "Yet in forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4) . . . "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (verse 10). So Nineveh which would be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah, was spared.

As the way of all flesh is, Nineveh repented but not for long. Jonah (825-782 B.C.) prophesied to Nineveh in the heyday of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Although there is no date given to the Book of Nahum, it is believed that a century or so after Jonah, God had to warn through the new prophet of total destruction without mercy coming to Nineveh in the next generation. A thousand years in God's sight is but as yesterday. To predict some disaster coming in the next generation is equivalent to a couple of hours. The message of God must be received with utmost concern the moment He proclaims it.

The message of Nahum is ominous as it comes from nowhere. Some scholars think he originated from Capernaum. 'Capernaum' means the village of Nahum. Did he reside here? It is more likely he wrote and died abroad.

His name shows he was a ‘Comforter,’ not to Nineveh, but to Judah, which for decades was harrassed by Assyrian kings before Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came on the scene.

As the theme of Nahum is Nineveh’s destruction it is well to study the background which justifies the judgment which is told by Graham Scroggie as follows:

Nineveh

The City

Nineveh lay on the eastern side of the Tigris, and was one of the greatest—if not the greatest—of the cities of antiquity. It had 1,200 towers, each 200 feet high, and its wall was 100 feet high, and of such breadth that three chariots could drive on it abreast. It was 60 miles in circumference, and could, within its walls, grow corn enough for its population of 600,000. Xenophon says the basement of its wall was of polish stone, and its width 50 feet. In the city was a magnificent palace, with courts and walls covering more than 100 acres. The roofs were supported by beams of cedar, resting on columns of cypress, inlaid and strengthened by bands of sculptured silver and iron; its gates were guarded by huge lions and bulls sculptured in stone; its doors were of ebony and cypress encrusted with iron, silver, and ivory, and panelling the rooms were sculptured slabs of alabaster, and cylinders and bricks with cuneiform inscriptions. Hanging gardens were filled with rich plants and rare animals, and served with other temples and palaces, libraries and arsenals, to adorn and enrich the city; and all was built by the labour of foreign slaves.

Cruelty of the Assyrians

These people ruled with hideous tyranny and violence from the Caucasus and the Caspian to the Persian Gulf, and from beyond the Tigris to Asia Minor and Egypt. The Assyrian kings literally tormented the world. They flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; they made pyramids of human heads; they sacrificed holocausts of the sons and daughters of their enemies; they burned cities; they filled

populous lands with death and devastation; they reddened broad deserts with carnage of warriors; they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders as with chaff; they impaled 'heaps of men' on stakes, and strewed the mountains and choked the rivers with dead bones; they cut off the hands of kings, and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities; they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests, and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs (Farrar): and these things they did without sentiment or compunction.

From these details we see that the city appeared impregnable, and the people unconquerable, after having exercised power for some six to eight hundred years.

The Fate of the City and People

Read the Book of Nahum in the light of the foregoing facts, and surely it will be felt that this utterance is not one of insensate vengeance, but of retributive justice. Just because God is God this had to be. The destruction of Nineveh, the defeat of the Assyrians, and the overthrow of the Empire were sudden and complete. Within half a century of the prophecy (in all likelihood) so completely did Nineveh perish that no trace was left of where it once was. Alexander the Great marched over its site, and did not know that a world-empire was buried under his feet, and nearer our own time (18th century) Niebuhr, the traveller, rode through Nineveh unknowingly. This was the first instance in the history of mankind of a Power so great perishing so instantly, and for ever.

Before this event, and since, cities have remained while empires have passed away, as witness, Rome, Athens, Istanbul, Damascus, Alexandria, Venice, and other cities, but never before or since, has a city suddenly disappeared as Nineveh did.

'The fiery empire of conquerors sank like a tropic sun. Its wrath had burned, unassuaged, "from", (in their own words)

“the rising to the setting sun”. No gathering cloud had tempered its heat or allayed its violence. Just ere it set in those last hours of its course, it seemed as if in its meridian. Its blood-stained disc cast its last glowing rays on that field of carnage in Susiana; then, without a twilight, it sank beneath those stormy waves, so strangely raised, at once and for ever. All, at once, was night. It knew no morrow’. (Pusey)

Added to human conflict—which could not have had such an issue—were the elements of water and fire.

‘The gates of the rivers are opened,
And the palace melts away’ (ii.6).

In 625 B.C. the Tigris had overflowed, and despairing of the safety of the city, Assur-bani-pal ‘made an exceeding great pile in the palace, heaped up there all the gold and silver, and the royal apparel, and having shut up his concubines and eunuchs in the house formed in the midst of the pile, consumed himself and all the royalties with them all’ (Pusey). Nahum predicted that again fire would assail Nineveh, which it did twenty years later, in 606 B.C.

‘Fire shall devour you;
It shall devour you as the locust does’ (iii.13,15).

Rawlinson says that ‘recent excavations have shown that fire was a great instrument in the destruction of the Nineveh palaces. Calcined alabaster, masses of charred wood and charcoal, colossal statues split through with the heat, are met with in parts of the Ninevite mounds, and attest the veracity of the prophecy.’

The Great Lesson of the Book

Nahum has but one theme, and this is that kingdoms built on the foundation of force and fraud shall certainly be destroyed; and that the Kingdom of God, reared on the foundation of truth and righteousness, is bound to triumph. Nineveh represented worldly power in antagonism to Yahweh, and so it had to perish. This is the theme which Nahum insists on with concentrated passion. ‘He strikes but one chord in the

harmony of prophetic song, (and) he strikes it with splendid decision and energy' (Findlay). He scarcely refers to Judah, and when he does, it is not to her sins and future punishment (i.12-15; ii.2), but she is viewed ideally, not actually.

Nahum is the prophet of *Nemesis*; of certain retribution for all evil, whether individual or national. The most recent illustration of this truth is the defeat of Germany and Italy in the last Great War (1939-1945), and it would be well if all intending aggressors and transgressors were to ponder it.

The Book as Literature

Findlay says: 'This little Book ranks amongst the finest things in Hebrew literature. In poetic fire and sublimity it approaches the best work of Isaiah'; and he instances its unity of conception, its artistic handling of its theme, its wealth of metaphor and brilliance of description, its firm swift movement, and vehemence of passion; and this is the verdict of those best able to judge.

The Outline

The Prophecy is in three main parts:

- I. Judgment on Nineveh Declared (i)
- II. Judgment on Nineveh Described (ii)
- III. Judgment on Nineveh Defended (iii)

8. Habakkuk

Except for legends, one that is found in the Apocrypha Book of Bel and the Dragon tells of Habakkuk going to the field with a bowl of pottage when he was carried away by an angel to feed Daniel in the Lions' Den, practically nothing is known of this prophet. The book bearing his name says nothing about the author, and the rest of Old Testament history gives no clue of his origin.

From internal evidence, scholars have dated his book to be written in the last years of Josiah's reign or during the reign of his wicked son King Jehoiakim. The book appears to be the work of a prophet living in Jerusalem.

Habakkuk means "embrace." Luther draws from his name that "he embraces his people and takes them into his arms, i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that, if God wills, it shall soon be better."

The Book of Habakkuk, as you begin to read, is quite different from other prophetic books. Although it is stated to be a "burden," similar to "burdens" in the other books, what makes it different from the rest is it is not addressed to the people but to God. It is a record of the prophet's many questions to God regarding the sufferings of the godly and the prosperity of the wicked, of judgment and of his own enlightenment: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). So Habakkuk is called the prophet of faith. The striking statement of the prophet of faith is quoted three times in the N.T. — (1) Romans 1:17; (2) Galatians 3:11; (3) Hebrews 10:38.

“The just shall live by faith” in the context of Habakkuk’s vision is the answer to his perplexity in 1:12-17. The Babylonians, because of their new found power over all other peoples, were puffed up in their own conceit: like the Germans and Japanese at the beginning of WWII. The way of Might is Right, though flourishing for a season, is the way to final destruction. This happened to the Assyrians who were subdued by the Babylonians, and after seventy years, history repeated itself when the Babylonians were conquered by the Medo-Persians, and so forth. On the other hand, the just and the righteous (who humbly trust in the Almighty) shall live by faith. Faith, truly, means “**F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Take **H**im. “The just shall live by faith” becomes the watchword of the 16th Century Reformation, and rings true to this day. It is the battle line between true Protestants and the Church of Rome, whose salvation dogma includes works, works, works. The Romanists anathematise those who go by faith alone. The ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) Document of 1994 is therefore a complete repudiation of God speaking through his prophet Habakkuk, “The just shall live by his faith.” This verse Habakkuk 2:4 is, nevertheless, key to the whole book and is the central theme on salvation in all the Scriptures.

According to *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, the Book of Habakkuk may be divided into six sections, the first four containing two dialogues between Jehovah and the prophet, whilst the last two contain confident declarations springing from and expanding the Divine reply.

- (1) 1:1-4. Habakkuk, compelled to live in the midst of violent wrong-doing, contemns of religion manifesting itself in the oppression of the righteous by the wicked, complains strongly of the silence and indifference of God.
- (2) 1:5-11. He receives an answer that a new and startling display of the Divine justice is about to be made. The Chaldaeans, swift, bitter, and terrible, are to sweep down and overwhelm the whole world. No fortress can resist their onslaught. The incredibility of this must lie, not in the fact that the Chaldaeans are the

aggressors, but rather that Jerusalem, spared so long, is now to share the fate of so many other cities.

- (3) 1:12-17. Some time may now be supposed to elapse before the next prophecy is spoken. During this period the prophet watches the progress of the Chaldeans, who have now (2:17) penetrated into Palestine. His observation raises a new and insoluble problem. This reckless, insolent, cruel, insatiable conqueror is worse than those he has been appointed to chastise. How can a holy God, so ready to punish the 'wicked' in Israel, permit one who deserves far more the name of 'wicked' to rage unchecked? Are wrong and violence to possess the earth for ever?
- (4) 2:1-4. The prophet, retiring to his watch-tower, whence he looks out over the world, to see it in ruins, receives an oracle which he is bidden to write down on tablets for all to read. He is told that the purpose of God is hastening to its fulfilment, and is encouraged to wait for it. Then follows the famous sentence, 'Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live in his faithfulness.' The meaning of this is plain. Tyranny is self-destructive, and carries within itself the seeds of doom. But while the evil-doer passes away, the just man, steadfast in the face of all contradiction, shall live, and last out the storm of judgment.
- (5) 2:5-20. Content with this message, the prophet utters, triumphantly, a five-fold series of woes against the pride, the greed, the cruel building enterprises, the sensuality, the idolatry, of the heathen power.
- (6) Ch. 3. Finally, in a magnificent lyric (a triumphal song), which, as its heading and close prove, has been adapted for use in the Temple worship, the prophet sings the glorious redeeming acts of God in the past history of the people, and in the certainty of His immediate appearance, bringing hopeless ruin on the enemy, declares his unwavering trust.

So read, this short book is seen to be a human document of unique value. It marks the beginnings of Hebrew reflective thought as to the workings of Providence in history, afterwards so powerfully expressed in Job and in the later prophets.

9. Zephaniah

Introduction

Zephaniah means, “The Lord hides.” The prophet traces back his ancestry to four generations, to King Hezekiah, so he has royal blood in his veins. More significant, he has the spirit of his great-great grandfather who was the first reformer of Judah. Hezekiah purified the Temple worship which was greatly polluted by his father wicked King Ahaz.

Zephaniah ministered half a century after Nahum in the reign of good King Josiah, Judah’s second reformer. He was therefore a contemporary of Jeremiah. The reformation of Josiah in 621 B.C. touched both Judah and Israel, though Israel was conquered and taken into exile by the Assyrians one hundred years ago. Despite Josiah’s strenuous efforts to reform the nation by destroying idol worship, it failed when he died. No wonder little mention is made of him by the prophet.

As to the reformation under King Josiah it is recorded in II Kings 22 and 23 as follows:

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. ² And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. ³ And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house

of the LORD, saying, ⁴ Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: ⁵ And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, ⁶ Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. ⁷ Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. ⁸ And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹ And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. ¹⁰ And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

¹¹ And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. ¹² And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, ¹³ Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. ¹⁴ So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her. ¹⁵ And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, ¹⁶ Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this

place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: ¹⁷ Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. ¹⁸ But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; ¹⁹ Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. ²⁰ Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

Chapter 23

And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. ² And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. ³ And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

⁴ And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. ⁵ And he

put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. ⁶ And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. ⁷ And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove. ⁸ And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. ⁹ Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. ¹⁰ And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. ¹¹ And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. ¹² And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. ¹³ And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. ¹⁴ And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. ¹⁵ Moreover the

altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. ¹⁶ And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. ¹⁷ Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. ¹⁸ And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. ¹⁹ And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. ²⁰ And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. ²¹ And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. ²² Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; ²³ But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem. ²⁴ Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

²⁵ And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. ²⁶ Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith

his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. ²⁷ And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. ²⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? ²⁹ In his days Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. ³⁰ And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead.

The main theme of the prophet's message is "The Day of the Lord." He speaks in:

- Chapter I : Judgment on Judah.
- Chapter II : Judgment on Nations.
- Chapter III : Judgment on Jerusalem and Israel's future restoration and global judgment.

Chapter I

Judgment In Judah

This chapter announces, “The Day of the Lord is at hand.” As in the other Prophets, the imminent invasion of Nebuchadnezzar is announced as an adumbration of the final Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will be a total global judgment.

The immediate judgment will be upon Judah and Jerusalem. This judgment will first be directed to the idols and false gods with their priests that have overwhelmed Judah.

They are Baal, god of the Canaanites, worshipped by the Israelites as early as the days of the Judges (2:13). The feminine deity associated with Baal is Ashtoreth. Baal worship is full of immoral practices.

The Chemarim, meaning “black” is taken from the black garments they wore.

Housetop worship of the host of heaven (sun, moon and stars). This worship is called Saheanism. Moses warned against it in Deuteronomy 4:19. This housetop worship of the heavenlies spread to almost every home.

Malcam is the same as Moloch (Amos 5:26) and Milcom is god of Ammon (I Kings 11:33).

Finally, the backsliders (verse 6).

Before “the Day of the Lord” judgment must fall on Judah, “the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice” and His guests are the Chaldeans.

How ironical is the judgment carried out on the Jews by the Babylonians as His priests to slay the sacrifices. Those to be slain first in the coming judgment must be those of the royal family who not only followed the heathen customs but also oppressed the poor, who “leap on the threshold” to rob the weak and the poor.

Punishment will come to those of Maktesh, a low place in Jerusalem where the bazaars were, and to those “settled on their lees,” who take life easy, who could not care less what God would do.

The rest of the chapter is self-explanatory.

Chapter II

Judgment On Nations And Israel's Future Restoration And Global Judgment

The only way whereby a sinner can escape God's judgment is REPENT! "Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the earth . . . seek righteousness . . . it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (verse 3). But will the meek seek the Lord?

Judgments on the Nations

1. Philistia (verses 4-7)
2. Moab and Ammon.

Read of their origin (Genesis 19:30-38). Because of the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the decline of the southern monarchy the pride of these Transjordan tribes increased greatly. They tried to seize Israel's land during their time of calamity. These people add insult to injury by reviling God's people.

Moab and Ammon will become like Sodom and Gomorrah. These lands will become desolate like the regions of the Dead Sea.

3. Ethiopia and Assyria.

Ethiopia (Cush) and Egypt are closely linked. There is reason to believe Ethiopians include Egyptians.

From Ethiopia the judgment proceeds to Assyria. The Book of Nahum treats more fully of the destruction of Assyria. Assyria has been that ancient power before the rise of Babylon to afflict Israel and Judah.

Chapter III

Judgment On Jerusalem

After the pronouncing of judgments on the nations, Zephaniah returns in Chapter III to his treatment of Jerusalem, though her name is not mentioned. Why must Jerusalem be destroyed? Because wickedness has filled up to her brim. Four distinct charges are levelled against the apostate city.

The princes, priests and prophets. As to the prophets, it is in Zephaniah that there is a full catalogue of their sins. Compare with Micah 3.

Verses 5-7 contain further chastenings and warnings of the Lord.

The Judgment of the Nations Again

To complete the cycle of prophecies of God's wrath, Zephaniah reverts in verse 8 to the theme of Chapter I, the judgment of God on all nations. The godly are to await the judgment of God on the nations.

The Kingdom Blessing of Israel

After all the judgments are accomplished the king of Israel will come and there will be evil no more.

Jerusalem will be restored with rejoicing. Jerusalem will be a name and a praise among all people.

With Israel today becoming a great nation and Jerusalem bubbling with a population of six hundred thousand, the evidence is clear that the Prince's return to his throne in Jerusalem is even at the threshold, ready to come in any day!

Historical Background Of The Post-Exilic Prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

According to Jeremiah's prophecy in Chapters 25 and 29 the Jewish POWs who were taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon would return after 70 years. As there were three batches of captives led away during a 20-year siege, 606, 598 and 586 B.C., so there were three batches that returned: 536 (Zerubbabel), 458 (Ezra), 445 (Nehemiah).

Haggai and Zechariah were among the first to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Malachi was the last to return under Nehemiah.

Not only was Jeremiah's prophecy of the Jews' return after 70 years fulfilled, there was also Isaiah's prophecy on the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the decree of Persian king Cyrus. "Had there been no return from Babylon, Judah would have shared the fate of Israel, and have blended with the East; the Hebrew Scriptures would have been lost; many of them now possessed would never have been written" (Scroggie).

The First Return registered 50,000. We might call them the Pilgrim Fathers of the Jews. By Cyrus' decree to return and rebuild their Temple, all those sacred vessels of silver and gold for temple service numbering over 5,000 were brought back to Jerusalem. The richer Jews and those born in Babylon during the captivity remained behind, like those living comfortably in America today, and were absorbed or dispersed elsewhere.

By way of recapitulation, the leaders of the First Return in 536 B.C. were Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest. Zerubbabel was of royal blood, a grandson of King Jehoiachin, grandson of good king Josiah. Zerubbabel means born in Babylon. Being the pioneer leader the difficulties he faced during his tenure of office were overwhelming.

Jerusalem was in ruins. Much of the land was usurped by Edomites. Israelites who intermarried with other races after the destruction of Samaria, the northern capital, became a mixed people called Samaritans. Such peoples were hostile to the Jewish returnees.

Being weaned of idolatry the Jewish returnees were zealous to revive the ancient worship by rebuilding of the Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Wisely they began by first erecting the Altar, where they could offer sacrifices to their God immediately. After one year, in 535 B.C., they laid the foundation of the Temple, amidst rejoicings mingled with wailings of the older Jews who were used to the splendour of Solomon's Temple.

There is a Chinese Christian saying, "When God works, Satan also works." No sooner were the foundations laid than opposition arose from every quarter. First it came disguised as condescending patronage. When the half-caste Samaritan's offer of help was rejected because of their part-heathenism, they flared up in open opposition. Through their accusations before the Persian authorities the building of the Temple was halted for 15 years! The initial zeal of the Jewish returnees was dampened to say the least. Some even gave up the thought of rebuilding.

In order to revive the work on the Temple, God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. From the text of Scripture we find that Haggai was the older prophet (Haggai 2:3) and Zechariah the younger (Zechariah 2:4). God is displeased when His House is unbuilt, sitting in the cold. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD" (Haggai 1:8).

10. Haggai

You will notice from Chart 103 of Scroggie's *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* that Haggai's revival ministry to the returnees lasted only four months. This shows his messages were very effective for it did not take too long to get the people moving. There were four messages he preached recorded in his book. These may be outlined as follows:

- I. A Word of Rebuke (1:1-11).
- II. A Word of Encouragement (2:1-9).
- III. A Word of Blessing (2:10-19).
- IV. A Word of Confirmation (2:20-23).

I. A Word Of Rebuke (1:1-11)

The troubles that have come upon the returnees were manifestation of God's displeasure on them. Why? Because while the people built themselves luxurious homes, the Temple of God was barely begun. God would be pleased with them and bless them when they would start building again. The message was well received by the returnees who responded to build in 24 days (verses 12-15).

II. A Word Of Encouragement (2:1-9)

Before long, the people got discouraged again, as is the way of all flesh. To encourage the returnees Haggai assured them God would supply all their needs, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine." Moreover the Lord was with them. Though the Temple they were

rebuilding could not compare with Solomon’s, God would see to it that a greater Temple, even the Millennial Temple, should rise out of great catastrophe before “the desire of all nations shall come.” By these words the people’s resolve to build was strengthened.

III. A Word Of Blessing (2:10-19)

By putting two questions to the people so as to elicit their answers and teach them a lesson, the prophet showed why the work of their hands was fruitless because they were unclean, and because they obeyed not their God. Nevertheless (if they would repent) the Lord should turn their curse into blessing.

IV. A Word Of Confirmation (2:20-23)

The prophet sees a great shaking of the Gentile powers to come. As for Zerubbabel His appointed servant to rebuild His House, he would be confirmed in his appointment. He was God’s signet, for “I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts’ (verse 23). What a comfort to every servant on whom God has set His seal.

CHART 103

THE MINISTRIES OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH						
B.C. 520-518						
B.C. 520					B.C. 519	B.C. 518
MONTHS					Silence	MONTH
6th	7th	8th	9th	11th		9th
Haggai	Haggai	Zechariah	1	2	Zechariah	Zechariah
			Haggai			
i. 2-11	ii. 1-9	i. 1-6	ii. 10-19 ii. 20-23	i. 7- vi. 15		vii-viii

11. Zechariah

Introduction

Zechariah means, “the Lord remembers.” He, together with Haggai, and Malachi, are post-exilic prophets.

Born in Babylon of a priestly family, he was among the first contingent of 50,000 returnees, sent under the decree of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. His colleague, an older man, was Haggai. Zechariah was both a priest and prophet, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Zechariah began to prophesy two months after Haggai (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). This was in 520 B.C. His ministry, like that of Haggai was to encourage the returnees to rebuild the Temple. Zechariah’s ministry, however, extended far beyond that of Haggai. And his prophetic horizon was far wider than that of the rest of the Minor Prophets. He had much more to say about the Messiah and His work.

Since Zechariah is a post-exilic prophet the promises of future glory cannot refer to the return from Babylon. As his book contains a good number of visions, it is called an apocalypse. It is sometimes referred to as the Revelation of the Old Testament.

The Book can be divided into two large sections. (I) Chapters 1-8, (II) Chapters 9-14.

In Section I we have a series of eight visions with the Prophet’s contemporaries particularly in view.

In Section II he deals with events of the end of Israel's history that extends into the Golden Millennium. Zechariah predicted the completion of the Temple, which took place in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15) but went far beyond that in the final chapters of his prophecy.

According to Charles L. Feinberg, the Book may be outlined:

- I. Visions (Chapters 1-6)
- II. Questions (Chapters 7-8)
- III. Burdens (Chapters 9-14)

The Prophet gives a complete spiritual history of Israel and of the relation of the Gentiles to her from the return from captivity to the end time. Messiah and Jerusalem are centres about which all the prophetic messages revolve. Zechariah has in view three empires: Persia (with Darius in Chapters 1 and 7; Greece (with Alexander in Chapter 9); and Rome (by implication, Chapters 12 and 14).

Chapter I

Four Visions

This first message of Zechariah given in second year of Darius shows that he was one speaking in the times of the Gentiles (which commenced in Nebuchadnezzar).

While Haggai had earlier rebuked the Jewish returnees for negligence in the rebuilding of the Temple, here Zechariah concentrated on the general low spiritual condition. The people needed to repent and be returned to the Lord in revival. The Lord's displeasure is seen in the destruction of their city and captivity for 70 years (Jeremiah 25, 29). The prophet warns the people against following in the waywardness of their ancestors. The prophets and the generations of yesteryears were gone but the Law of God remained, fulfilled to the last letter.

I. Vision of the Horses

This vision is the key to all of the messages following. Like the horsemen in Revelation 6:1-8, here are also horsemen, and the colour of the horses upon which they ride are red, speckled and white. And who are the horsemen? They are messengers sent to go through the earth and to report back what they see. And what they see is "the whole earth sitteth still and is at rest."

The time of this setting is 70 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. But the time has now come when for Jerusalem's sake God Almighty arises against the Gentile powers that are at peace,

who had brought sorrow and affliction to God's people. But now is the Almighty's time to restore Jerusalem and have the Temple rebuilt. A measuring line is stretched forth upon Jerusalem, which signifies the building of cities in the land in prosperity. Comfort is come to Zion, and Jerusalem is favoured once more.

II. Vision of the Four Horns

Now, the horn in O.T. terminology is a symbol for power. Animals, like the ox, possess power in their horns (Micah 4:13; Daniel 8:3-4). In the light of Daniel and Revelation, we conclude this passage to refer to four empires of Daniel 2, 7 and 8. The powers in this context that scattered the Israelites and Jews were Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome. In Zechariah's time Greece and Rome had not yet appeared. This is where prophecy completes the picture.

III. Vision of the Four Carpenters

These are God's workmen who come to fray, to cast out the Gentile powers who have oppressed Judah and scattered them. The scattering of Israel had been so furious that no man could lift up his head. In modern times, we have seen what atrocities were perpetrated upon the Jews, 6 million of them, under the iron heel of Hitler. God surely will deal righteously and severely with Israel's enemies.

Chapter II

Vision Of The Man With Measuring Line

This vision of a man with a measuring line (measuring reed in Ezekiel 40:3,5) speaks of a builder, in our day, with a measuring tape. And here the man is going to measure the length and breadth of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is going to be rebuilt. Inasmuch as Zechariah, with his friend Haggai, is sent to encourage the Jewish returnees to rebuild the Temple, it is revealed to them the rebuilding also of the City. This was carried out later on by Nehemiah, in the Restoration of the City wall.

From here Zechariah's prophescope turns to the distant horizon where the prophet sees a greater Jerusalem spreading far and wide in prosperous satellite town and villages. These all in open country with no necessity of building walls to protect them, for God will surround them with a wall of fire and His glory will be in their midst. The wall of fire reminds of God's protection of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, a cloud by day and a fire by night (Exodus 40:38).

In this future setting all the dispersed of Israel "to the four winds" are called to regather, even from Babylon where many Jews still lingered to stay. This message "to come home" is beamed to children of Israel exiled to many nations, for God had a loving care for His people. The Jews are "the apple of His eye." The tables will be turned when the chosen people, servants in many a foreign land, will become masters.

This is a message of consolation to the captive Jews not only in Babylon but throughout the world of the Day when God will rule the world in righteous peace from Jerusalem in the Holy Land in a Golden Millennium, a literal one thousand years.

This prophecy is truly in the process of fulfilment in these last days. For Jerusalem, which was somewhat rebuilt in the time of Nehemiah was destroyed by General Titus in A.D. 70, with the loss of a million souls. The Jews were dispersed into all the world to become known as “wandering Jews.”

It was a miracle for Israel to become a nation again May 14, 1948, but her population then was only two-third million. Today there are over 6 millions in Israel, and Jerusalem is a modern city with over 600,000. This restoration or resurgence brings us to the doorsteps of the above prophecy. The ushering in of a thousand years of peaceful reign of the Messiah on earth will happen after Armageddon. More about the preparations for the Coming of Messiah are to follow in the following chapters.

Chapter III

Vision Of The High Priest

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Psalm 130:3).

Although the priests under Ezra and Nehemiah’s ministry were breakers of the VII Commandment, marrying foreign wives and forsaking the wives of their youth, nothing is recorded against Joshua the high priest, co-leader with Zerubbabel in the first return to Jerusalem from exile, 536 B.C.

Under divine scrutiny this is what the spiritual X-ray film shows. In a vision the prophet Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest being “resisted” by Satan before the Angel of the Lord. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes Satan for his fault-finding. Satan is “the Accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10). No doubt, before God, Joshua is a “brand plucked out of the fire” (I Corinthians 3:15) and was clothed with “filthy garments.” The Lord is gracious to give him a new change of clothing, signifying that his sins are forgiven, being clothed with His Righteousness. Such a cleansing is every believer’s need, not the least every Christian leader. The mitre is mentioned in Exodus 28:36-38 which has upon it the words HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD. The mitre is worn on the high priest’s forehead “to bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall

hallow in all their holy gifts ... that they may be accepted before the Lord.”

This outward cleansing in vision must be substantiated by an inward obedience, that he might be able to be a judge over Israel. The judgment he gives concerns more the ecclesiastical than the civil (Leviticus 10:10). He is also to keep the courts of the Temple from being profaned. The high priest is one who has direct access to the Lord, being the nation's representative.

From Joshua the high priest the vision leads us to the BRANCH, even as his name is that of the coming Saviour of Israel. Joshua is a type of the Messiah. The stone is another name for the Messiah. The seven eyes signify the perfection of wisdom, even the Lord's omniscience. The engraving of the stone refers to Messiah's beauty and grace as seen in polished stones. Through this Stone and Branch Israel's iniquity shall be removed. In that day refers to the Millennium and “under the vine and under the fig tree,” which occurs in Micah's prediction of the Day when there will be no war but Christ's peaceful reign (Micah 4:1-4), should also make us glad.

Chapter IV

Vision Of The Golden Candlestick

The golden candlestick is part of the Temple furniture which originates from Moses' Tabernacle. It signifies Israel to be God's appointed Light to the world (so is the Church).

In this vision we see more than a candlestick, yea, the seven-branched candelabrum given by God to Moses "after the pattern that was showed thee in the mount" (Exodus 25:40). On top of the candlestick is a bowl and seven pipes to the seven lamps. Standing on either side of the candlestick are two olive trees. Protruding from two branches of the olive trees are two golden pipes that convey golden oil from the trees to the lamps. What is the significance of this vision?

The prophet cannot understand the mystery before his eyes except it is revealed to him. The revelation comes from the Angel of the Lord, who is none other than the Lord. This vision is given to the civil leader of the returnees, to Zerubbabel their governor inasmuch as the previous vision was for Joshua the high priest. It is given to Zerubbabel that he should not use human means in the rebuilding of the Temple. It must be by the power of God, even through His Holy Spirit. The golden oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. If it is by the Holy Spirit, it must be according to His sacred Word.

By way of application to pastors building churches today, many resort to human methods—holding concerts, conducting jumble sales, selling home-cooked food, fun fairs, etc. But the returns are

like catching fish by hook and line, when they can catch two shiploads if they follow the Lord (Luke 5).

With God-power the mountain of difficulties facing Zerubbabel was raised to the ground—the 15-year delay brought about by the enemies in the land was swept away when Zerubbabel now worked in the spirit of His power. The Temple was completed in a matter of four years in 516 B.C. (The altar and foundations of the temple were laid in 536 B.C.)

Zerubbabel who put the headstone to the building was supported by the people's shouting, "Grace, grace." Yes, it is by God's grace that we can succeed. In this light our beginnings in the work of the Lord may be small, but our consummation will be great. Christianity began through the 12 apostles. In their lifetime, it spread to the four corners of the Roman Empire.

The plummet in Zerubbabel's hand shows him measuring vertical dimensions of the new Temple. The seven eyes signify God's omniscience and wisdom, and His providential care of God's people.

The two olive trees no doubt are the two leaders through whom the power of God is channelled into the Temple now in the course of construction.

Chapter V

Vision Of The Flying Roll

This flying roll, apparently made of parchment, sheepskin or goatskin, which ancients used for writing, has the measurement of the holy place in Moses' Tabernacle and the measurement of the porch of the Temple of Solomon, 20 cubits x 10 cubits = 30 feet x 15 feet. This flying roll soars over the whole earth or the whole land (of Israel).

In Jehovah's covenant with Israel that they should obey Him, He seals it with blessings to an obedient people, but with a curse upon those who rebel against Him (Deuteronomy 27 and 28). Apparently this flying roll issuing from the House of God, contains the middle commandment of each of the Two Tablets of Law. The III Commandment forbids taking God's Name in vain, which is stated to be swearing (with a false oath). The VIII Commandment which forbids stealing curses those addicted to it inasmuch as the III Commandment curses those who forswear.

It seems the sin committed by the people of God in Zechariah's time centred on cheating, stealing commercially under the guise of religion. Like Christian con-men today who prey on unsuspecting, innocent people in the Church. This is a double crime that must be totally annihilated. The culprit may try to keep his nefarious plan or actual crime secret, like one hiding in some secret room in his house. This will be of no avail because as the flying roll cannot be thwarted from entering his house, so will God's punishment be irresistible. It

shall “remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof” (verse 4). During the Japanese occupation there was a lot of cheating and malpractices in black market dealings, counterfeit goods and false pretences. Many who were poor before, by risking their lives and by fair means or foul, made good money. They became mushroom millionaires. When law and order was restored under the British Administration, so did those millionaire mushrooms dry up overnight!

Vision of the Woman in the Ephah

An ephah is equivalent to 8 gallons or 36 litres, being a Hebrew measurement of capacity. An ephah is used in commercial transactions, measuring whatever is bought or sold. When the lead cover of a talent’s weight is lifted up, from this ephah a woman is found seated inside. The angel said to Zechariah, “This is wickedness.” So saying “he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.”

This vision is akin to the vision of the scarlet woman riding a scarlet beast. Here is spiritual adultery, ecclesiastical power married to political power. In this light, what is the woman sitting inside the ephah but commercial adultery? This is described in James 5:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. (James 5:1-6)

Another interpretation of the ephah is that all the sins of the Jews had filled the measure of God, especially the sin of idolatry. Matthew Henry says,

The wrath of God against impenitent sinners is what they cannot escape, and what they cannot bear up under. Guilt is upon the sinner as a talent of lead to sink him to the lowest hell . . . He sees the ephah, with the woman thus pressed in it, carried away to some far country. The instruments to do this were two women, with wings like those of a stork, large and strong, and to make them fly more swiftly, they had the wind in their wings . . .

There are all kinds of conjecture about these two women. We take it to be one of God's order of angels, like women prison warders today, who take care of women prisoners. The woman in the ephah is transported airborne swiftly to the land of Shinar, even Babylon, where man's first rebellion occurred in the building of the Tower of Babel. A house is built for the ephah of wickedness which means the wickedness which is taken out of Judah is returned to its own base. The Jews learned many wicked things in Babylon. Now that they were returned to the Holy land of their fathers they had no more dealings with Babylonism.

Chapter VI

Significance Of The Four Chariots

In his vision the prophet sees four chariots drawn by red, black, white and grisled and bay horses. These who are sent to walk to and fro through the earth (and report back on what they see) are the four spirits of the heavens. From these chariots with their coloured horses we are reminded of the four horsemen of Chapter 1:7-11. By comparison we must conclude the four horsemen are also spirits of the heavens. These reappear in Revelation 6, who are practically of the same category except for the riders who are described in greater detail.

What do their colours represent? In the order of the Revelation scenario, white signifies peace and prosperity, red war and bloodshed, black famine and pestilence, grey (grisled) death and hell.

We need not identify the countries the horsemen visit according to their colours. What we must know is that God is in sovereign control of every situation on earth, through the agency of His angels who are called ‘spirits’ in Hebrew 1:7. Therefore the white horseman in Revelation 6 cannot be the Antichrist as is commonly interpreted. Rather he is the angel of peace and prosperity until overtaken by the red horseman carrying a great sword to take peace away from the earth.

Insofar as we are concerned the key to the interpretation of Revelation 6 is to be found in Zechariah 6:5, “And the angel

answered and said unto me, These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.”

The Symbolic Crowning of Joshua

From the visions given to Zechariah above, our scene changes to an acting out of prophecy.

Here comes three men from the exiled community in Babylon, bringing gifts for the rebuilding of the Temple. These three men are of Heldai, of Tobijah and of Jedaiah. Zechariah is commanded to take the delegation to the house of Josiah, son of Zephaniah. There they took the silver and gold and made crowns (rather a double crown) and set the crown on Joshua’s head. This was symbolic of the crowing of the coming Messiah, the King-Priest.

Zechariah the prophet then addresses Joshua in his coronation of One whose name is the Branch “who will grow up out of his place.” He shall build the (Millennial) Temple and he shall receive the glory and sit upon his throne and also be priest. He is the King-Priest. In the light of the mandate to the Branch to build the Millennial Temple, the notion that the Jews will build a tribulation temple before the coming of Messiah is untenable. That Messiah will be a King-Priest is a new idea to them.

The double crown was to be a memorial for Helem (Heldai), Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen (another name of Josiah) and was to be placed in the Temple of the Lord until Messiah comes. The crown was to teach God’s universal purpose to use Israel as the means to reach the world. Messiah will bring both Jews and Gentiles together. This is the sign of His Messiahship. Amen.

Chapter VII

Obedience Is Better Than Fasting

Two years after receiving the visions in the aforesaid chapters, Zechariah was visited by a party of the exiled in Babylon. These Jews were led by Sherezer and Regemmelech “to pray before the Lord.” According to Deuteronomy 17:9 they were come to consult the priests and the prophets who were Zechariah and Haggai about fasting in the fifth month, in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem “these so many years.”

Now that the Temple was steadily rising under the hand of Zerubbabel the Governor and Joshua the high priest, those from Babylon wanted to know whether they should go on fasting and mourning as they had been doing the last 70 years. The fasting and mourning had become a burden to them.

God answered through His prophet Zechariah that all the fastings these 70 years were not instituted by Him but by themselves. Not only the fifth month to commemorate the burning of Jerusalem 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 52:12,13) but also the seventh month to mourn the assassination of Governor Gedaliah (II Kings 25:23-25; Jeremiah 41:1-3) these had lost their meaning. For, after the fasting they would eat and drink in abandonment, for themselves again.

Obedience beforehand was more important than fasting afterwards. It was better the people of Jerusalem had heeded the former prophets when they were well off to practise love and mercy. Then they would continue to prosper. Because they did not, so judgment came upon them in their being exiled to Babylon.

Since these representatives from Babylon inquired, the same message the Lord had sent through the former prophets was repeated to them through Zechariah:

And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate. (verses 8-14)

A modern example of the irony of fasting and mourning is how Roman Catholics commemorate the Death of Christ. In some South American countries, certain of them while reenacting the crucifixion of Jesus would get drunk and behave disorderly during the fasting season.

And in the commemoration of Christmas, there are those in Singapore who revel in fleshly lusts, not knowing what Christmas is.

As for Life BP Church, we make it a practice every year to give the Christmas offerings to needy and worthy members, missionaries and missions. God has blessed this remembrance of the needy, inasmuch as He has commanded, “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:13,14).

Chapter VIII

Jerusalem On Top Of The World

Instead of fasting and mourning for a Jerusalem burnt down in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians, the returnees now busily rebuilding the Temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua are given a shining preview of things to come. Jerusalem will be on top of the world for God is returned to bless her again. Zechariah's *propheoscope* shows Jerusalem now become the City of Truth for God dwells in it once again. Jerusalem is truly the Holy City and Israel the Holy Nation.

Jerusalem is also the City of peace where her inhabitants live to a ripe old age, and families are prosperous, for her streets are overflowing with children playing. Jerusalem will become fully populated by returnees from east and west, that is from every part of the earth. This is elaborated by Isaiah to be "from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12) and in 43:5,6 as, "I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Ezekiel says, "And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land" (Ezekiel 7:21). Even Amos prophesied, "And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up

out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God” (Amos 9:14,15).

This prophecy of Israel’s Restoration in the future was given to encourage the hands of the returnees as they were feverishly engaged in the rebuilding of the Temple, yea, even in the beginning when the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Though there was a time before this when there was little to be earned by man or beast, for little work was available, and there was no peace or security in the land, God was returned to set the land at peace. God would bless the land with dew again that the vine should be fruitful and the ground yield her increase. The people would be affluent again. Instead of being a curse among the heathen, both Judah and Israel would be a blessing. So, let their hands be strong.

Instead of punishing them whose father had provoked the Lord to anger, the Lord has turned around to bless Jerusalem and Judah. In the light of all this:

These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD. And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

Two more fasts were added to be abrogated, of the fourth and the tenth month, also concerning some event in the Fall of Jerusalem. Instead of fasts, let them turn them into feasts, in the light of peace and truth coming to Jerusalem.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the

LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

This prophecy look further to a growing movement of people from many cities and from powerful nations who would fly to Jerusalem on pilgrimage — “to pray for the Lord” (verse 22). Many people from many nations will be led by the Jews to seek the Lord’s blessing in their land. In the Millennium it will be the Jews’ turn to be missionaries to the nations afar off. “God’s presence with the Jews would make the Jewish nation great. Jerusalem, being on top of the world, will be looked up to by all the nations of the earth.” Not America to be sure!

Chapter IX

Wars And The Prince Of Peace

Higher critics deny Chapter IX - XIV to be from Zechariah's pen as they have attacked the authorship of Daniel. But the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the O.T., 200 B.C., and the compilers of the Jewish canon recognise Zechariah's authorship. Such ancient witnesses to God's Word are hard to assail.

It is to be noted that Chapters I - VIII refers chiefly to the times in which the prophet lived, and the subject in view was the rebuilding of the Temple. Chapters IX - XIV, the second part of the Book, looks rather to the future.

While Chapters I - VIII treats of Israel under Medo-Persia rule, Chapters IX, X looks beyond to Greece, Chapter XI to Rome, Chapters XII - XIV to Israel in the very end-times, at the second coming of Christ.

Chapter IX:1-8 turns the *prophescope* to the campaigns of Alexander the Great and to his deliverance of Jerusalem. The prophet saw in "the land of Hadrach" (a name for the Persian Empire?) the astounding conquest of Damascus and Hamath. An important commercial city to this day, the modern Hamma, situated on the Orontes River, is 120 miles north of Damascus. These two cities belong to Syria.

With Syria subdued, Alexander turned his attention to the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre. Tyre was the more important of the two. It was a maritime power that withstood even

Nebuchadnezzar for 13 years. The secular historian Diodorus Siculus wrote of Tyre, "Tyre had the greatest confidence, owing to her insular position and fortifications and the abundant stores she had prepared." To conquer the island kingdom, Alexander built a causeway, that is, one like linking Singapore and Johore Bahru. Using the ruins of the old city on the mainland he dumped all the debris into the sea until it reached the island fortress. In seven months he attained his goal. He slew thousands of the island defenders and set the city on fire. (A lesson for little Singapore?)

Thy riches, and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy calkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war, that are in thee, and in all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin. The suburbs shall shake at the sound of the cry of thy pilots. And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land; And shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes: And they shall make themselves utterly bald for thee, and gird them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for thee with bitterness of heart and bitter wailing. And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and lament over thee, saying, What city is like Tyrus, like the destroyed in the midst of the sea? When thy wares went forth out of the seas, thou filledst many people; thou didst enrich the kings of the earth with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise. In the time when thou shalt be broken by the seas in the depths of the waters thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall. All the inhabitants of the isles shall be astonished at thee, and their kings shall be sore afraid, they shall be troubled in their countenance. The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more. (Ezekiel 27:27-36)

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD;

Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas. Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? but thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 28:1-10)

Having conquered Tyre, Alexander presses on to take the whole of Philistia, a continuation of the Mediterranean seaboard. Except for Gath, these cities were taken: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod.

In the conquest of Gaza, the king or satrap was tied to a chariot and dragged around the city till he died.

Ashdod was replaced by a mixed people, hence the term “bastard.” It was Alexander’s policy, as with the Assyrians, to mingle conquered people together so as to break their resistance.

From here the *proplescope* is focused on the distant future, to the day of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. Philistia will be converted from their idolatrous practices. They will dwell with the Jews like one people.

During the turmoil of Alexander’s conquest, however, God promises to protect His House and people. Thus, when Alexander passed by Jerusalem up and down in his campaigns, he left the Holy

City alone. From here is the prophet's extended vision of the last days.

From Alexander the Great, the prophet now sees a vision of the King of Israel, the lowly Messiah riding on a donkey. Matthew 21:5 confirms the vision to refer to our Lord in his triumphal entry to Jerusalem. What a contrast to the ruthless world ruler is the King of kings. He comes to conquer rather the hearts of the people.

While verse 9 refers to Christ's first coming, verse 10 leads into His Second Coming. He will then put down all rebellion and His dominion will extend from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

From Messiah's peaceful, universal reign, the prophet declares God would set free Israel's prisoners from the waterless pit by the blood of her covenant. God is faithful, though Israel was not. Her prisoners are those still in Babylon who had not returned to Jerusalem under Cyrus' decree. The Lord calls on the exiles to return to Zion for He will make them strong in battle.

Verses 13-17 refers to victories under the Maccabees when the Jews successfully revolted against Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. (Daniel 11:32; 8:9-14). Judah was God's bow and Ephraim His arrow and God's people His sword. Even His lightnings, thunders and whirlwinds of the south would come to Israel's aid. They would tread down the enemy as slingstones and cause much blood to shed over their enemies.

And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids. (verses 16, 17)

Chapter X

The Dispersion Of Ephraim And Judah And Their Regathering

Continuing with the earthly blessings mentioned in Chapter 9:17 the people are exhorted to pray to their God for rain — by believing prayer and not through heathen ways.

The latter rains fall in spring, and by these rains the grains begin to ripen. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” especially the rains from the hands of a bountiful Father. “Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things” (Jeremiah 14:22).

But Israel in past days had resorted to the wicked ways of idolatry. These malpractices resulted in their captivity. They were without shepherds during their years of dispersion. The he-goats, who headed the flock were the civil rulers who led them astray. These civil leaders were those of the nations who oppressed the exiles. God will punish the tyrants and save His flock.

From the figure of sheep, the Word changes it into a horse, well-equipped for battle. Israel will be that horse specially groomed. This is to be fulfilled when Israel’s Messiah comes to her rescue. Messiah will come from the House of Judah.

In verse 4 there are three things that will come from the house of Judah — the cornerstone, the battle bow, and the nail. The

cornerstone (Isaiah 28:13) is a well-known symbol of the Messiah, “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (I Peter 2:6). The battle-bow bespeaks of the Messiah as a Man of War (Exodus 15:3). The nail refers to the large peg in the tent on which many valuables can be hung. The peg speaks of the dependable one, even as Eliakim the Governor was called a nail in a sure place, and they shall hang their vessels and cups, etc. upon it (Isaiah 22:20-24). Messiah will have the qualities of the abovementioned, when He comes to rule. And He will cast out every oppressor from Israel. See Chapter 9:8.

In these verses we see the well-equipped horse noted as invincible warriors. They will vanquish their enemies who come on horses against them. The house of Joseph representing the Northern Ten Tribes, and the house of Judah the Southern Kingdom, will be brought back. They will be blessed, and their past forgotten.

Ephraim, that is another name for the house of Joseph, which refers again to the Northern Kingdom, will be brought back in the last days when the nation will be regathered. There is a great movement whereby the Nation of Israel, reestablished May 14, 1948 has now a population of over 6 million. Israel, that has been sown in the field of Gentile nations worldwide will be recalled and will return wholly to the Lord. Both father and children will witness the Restoration of their land. While Egypt and Assyria are mentioned as lands from which they will return, the term “far countries” (verse 9) is also mentioned.

Verse 11 says, “And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up. . .” is surely fulfilled by the early returnees who gatecrashed by the boatloads. Under British Mandate, there was an yearly quota. Those who exceeded the quota were impounded on the island of Cyprus to wait for their turn. Many came defying such limitation, who landed under cover of darkness in shallow seas. What a stark contrast with those who now fly in comfort, Boeings 747!

Chapter XI

Propescope On Lebanon, Etc.

Inasmuch as we have seen in Chapter 10:10-12 the return of the Jews by boat and landing clandestinely on the Lebanese coast during the days of British mandate 1918-1948, so it is wonderful to discover that Zechariah's prophecy, Chapter 11:1-6, is also fulfilled in our lifetime!

Lebanon, which means "white," is first mentioned in the Bible by Moses when he recalled to the children of Israel what God had commanded them to do in Horeb, soon after coming out of Egypt. "The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, ... Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the seaside, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, ..." (Deuteronomy 1:7).

Lebanon is the land of the ancient Phoenicians who spread their civilisation throughout the Mediterranean as seafaring traders and colonisers. The Phoenician city-state of Tyre flourished about 1000 B.C., whose king Hiram "had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold according to all his desire" (I Kings 9:11). But 250 years after this, the prophet Isaiah predicted that Tyre would "be forgotten seventy years" (Isaiah 23:15) while Sidon (Sidon) would have "no rest" (Isaiah 23:12).

Lebanon, ancient Phoenician land of Tyre and Sidon, rose and fell with the fortunes of Israel in the course of that period of history

when super-powers clashed with each other over their soil. Together with Israel, she came under the sway of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome in successive conquests. In modern times, Lebanon came under the control of the Ottoman Empire (1517-1917), but the French were the last to rule this Arab State, that is after World War I. In 1943, while WWII was still raging, Lebanon became totally independent and a member of the Arab League. Although a member of the Arab League, she did not participate in the 1967 and 1973 Wars with Israel. Nevertheless, 400,000 Palestinian Arabs made homeless by the Arab-Israeli Wars had crossed over into Southern Lebanon where many refugee camps were established. The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) used these camps as a training ground for Arab guerillas to launch attacks on Israel. In turn, Israeli forces counter-attacked, “eye for eye and tooth for tooth.” The trading of blows became so bad that the Israelis invaded Lebanon in a war that lasted from 1982 to 1985. The PLO was physically expelled from Lebanon, with much devastation to the Land.

While Isaiah had earlier prophesied the Babylonian conquest of Tyre and Sidon, chief cities of Lebanon; Zechariah, who lived 200 years after Isaiah, looked across two millenniums to another Lebanon. Zechariah sees a vision of another regathering of Israel: “I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them” (Zechariah 10:10). This same vision in wider perspective is seen also by Isaiah (Isaiah 11:11-13).

Now, the first return of the Jews took place 536 B.C. from Babylon after seventy years’ exile (under Nebuchadnezzar). The second return which both Isaiah and Zechariah predict took place, without a doubt, in 1948 when modern Israel was re-established as a nation. Connected with this second return in 1948, Isaiah sees a war of the new Israeli nation involving the territories occupied by the Philistines (Gaza), Syria (the east), Edom, Moab, Ammon (Jordan) and Egypt. This was serially fulfilled in the Six Day War of 1967 and

the Yom Kippur War of 1973. But the latest War fought by Israel in the northern front was in Lebanon 1982-85. This was seen by Zechariah in Zechariah 11:1-6 “Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled. Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not. For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour’s hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them.”

Until the outbreak of Civil War in 1975, Lebanon was a prosperous country compared with her other Arab neighbours. Known as “Switzerland of the Middle East,” she was a favourite country of tourists. Beirut, with a modern seaport, had some of the most luxurious hotels. But the Civil War and Israel’s invasion has wrecked the cities and destroyed Lebanon’s previous prosperity. A centre of trade and banking, with over 70 banks for the Arab world, so that she was also called the “Zurich of the Middle East,” she is today reduced almost to shambles by 15 years of continuous bombing and bloodshed. Losses sustained in housing and trade amount to billions of US dollars.

If Isaiah had seen what has been fulfilled in the 1967 and 1973 Wars in the south, Zechariah confirms with a vision of war in the north. Following the return of Israel by sea through the Lebanese coast (Zechariah 10:10-12), the prophet is led in spirit to announce an open invasion of Lebanon (Zechariah 11:1-6). The high and mighty, the barons and tycoons, described as cedars and fir trees, are burned. The fire is the fire from guns and rockets. The war in Lebanon echoes across the Sea of Galilee to Bashan on the east.

In verse 3 the howling of the shepherds refers to the Lebanese Government. It could do little to restrain the roaring young lions, the PLO fighters under Yasser Arafat. The country is in turmoil in the struggle between the Lebanese Government and the Palestinians. This resulted in the slaughter of refugees, who became a pawn in stronger hands, whoever they might be. For, apart from the PLO, there were the Druzes, Hizbollahs, Syrians and the Israeli Army. The whole land of Lebanon was a real mess.

In contrast with the anarchy mentioned above, there is Messiah the true Shepherd. The prophet then saw himself carrying out the duties of the Messiah in feeding the poor of the flock. He took two staves and named them, the first Beauty and the second, Bands. Beauty stands for Graciousness and Bands for Bonds. The first shows God's restraint on the nations from destroying Israel. The second refers to the brotherly ties within Israel itself. With the coming of the Messiah Israel will be preserved from destroying nations while the brotherly bonds in Israel itself will be strengthened.

In one month the Shepherd found it necessary to cut off three undutiful undershepherds. This is a difficult verse to decipher. It is interpreted by some to refer to the three offices in the government of the people of Israel, viz: the office of prophet, priest and king (civil magistrate). Since there is no good government, the people are left to die of themselves in their sorry plight.

To symbolise the severing of certain relationships, the Messiah breaks His staff Beauty. This signals the breaking of covenant which God had made with all the peoples (not Israel). He had placed them under restraint, lest they hurt His own people. With the restraint removed, Titus, e.g., destroyed the Temple. Anticipating the fulfilling of this prediction, the prophet says the staff was broken "in that day." Again it was the poor of the flock, the godly remnant, that suffered.

In order to test the gratitude of the people for the ministry of the Messiah, He asks the nation to give His wages. Instead of returning Him love and devotion, they gave Him 30 pieces of silver. According

to Exodus 21:32 this was the worth of a gored slave. What an insult! The prophet is commanded to throw away the sum to the potter in the Lord's house. This verse is quoted in Matthew 27:7-10 where the evangelist is recording Judas' betrayal of Jesus and the cursed result of the betrayal. The difficulty here is that the prophecy was quoted as from Jeremiah, not Zechariah. The solution to this difficulty is probably this: This prophecy had been spoken (rather than written) by Jeremiah. Many years later, Zechariah could have adapted some of the language, handed down from Jeremiah by oral transmission (both men were priests) into his own prophecy concerning the value of the payment price" (*The Defenders Study Bible*).

Now the prophet acts out the final severing of relations with Israel. The staff Bands is cut asunder to show the separation of brotherhood between Israel and Judah. This was fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem under Titus when internal strife was part of its downfall.

The Foolish Shepherd

Since the people rejected the Messiah they will have the Foolish Shepherd, such as Herod the Great and Ptolemy IV. The one finally to come is the Antichrist of Daniel 11:36-39, II Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Revelation 13:11-18.

The Foolish Shepherd is the Wicked One. He mistreats the sheep and will be punished. His power will be taken from him, and his intelligence to rule.

Chapter XII

Siege Of Jerusalem

From this chapter to the end of the Book we are introduced into one of the most remarkable prophecies on Israel and her destiny. “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7). The Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, is come to her rescue.

Though there will be gathered a multi-national army to fight Israel, particularly Jerusalem and Judah (which includes the West Bank), God will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling and burdensome stone against all who lay siege to it. The cup is a symbol of God’s wrath, and the burdenstone reminds of Jesus’ words, “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner . . . And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:42-44). Jesus is the righteous Judge sinners will have to reckon with.

In the present Peace-making between Israel and the Palestinians, the process is constantly shattered by Palestinian uprisings. Unless the Lord has been Israel’s Keeper, much greater damage could have been done. The power of God, ruling and overruling, will keep His own now and until the very end. The Lord may come in our lifetime. It is later than we think! Every Palestine *intifada* (uprising) is one more milestone on this troublous road to Armageddon.

Nevertheless, a period of 3½ years of enforced peace under the World-Dictator will emerge (Daniel 9:27). This phoney peace will be broken in the middle of the last week of years, which will be followed by 3½ years of war. Then, when nuclear bombs and missiles will be hurled in a macabre grand finale, the Messiah must come to put down all rebellion.

During the last battle to take Jerusalem the enemy's "horses" will be smitten with terror and with blindness. He will empower both Government and people of the Jews with strength to vanquish the invaders — like fire against wood and hay. In the process, the environs of Jerusalem, "the tents of Judah" will be saved first — by the Lord Himself. The Lord Himself will inspire the people of Jerusalem, even the weak and fearful, to astounding heights of courage like David, and the House of David will become like the angel of the Lord. God will destroy the nations allied together in their assault on Jerusalem.

In the welter of this final conflagration the Messiah will appear to the Jews who cry for His Help. As the pierced hands of Jesus are shown, the Jews, who all these centuries have rejected Him, will come to their senses. The blind now see what has been hidden from their eyes. Then will they mourn for their sin of rejecting the Messiah all through their history like mourning the death of their only son. This mourning will be as the mourning of Hadadrimmon (II Kings 5:18) in the valley of Esdraelon near the fortified city of Megiddo. This spot is famous in Israel's past history (Judges 5:19) and will be the scene of the last battle according to Revelation 16:16, "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (which means Hill of Slaughter). The mourning will be so severe that every family will keep apart between husbands and wives. This shows the depths of the Jews' repentance, so much so that each soul would be alone with God during that hour, even between husbands and wives.

Chapter XIII

Israel's Repentance And Climax Of Battle Of Armageddon

In this hour of mourning, the Jews who had rejected the crucified Saviour will gladly come for salvation and cleansing in that fountain filled with blood. William Cooper's famous hymn, "There is a fountain filled with blood" is inspired by this very verse on forgiveness of sins to the repentant, Jew or Gentile.

The cleansing is immediately followed by the total destruction of remaining idols, the casting out of false prophets and mediums. The gift of prophecy will cease because the Messiah is come. Should any prophet arise to speak and he speaks of his own, it will be the duty of his next of kin, even father and mother, to stamp the evil out. All idolatry connected with Beast-worship or worship of the man of sin with the false prophet will be wiped out by the Living and True God (Revelation 13:10, 11-18). In the Old Testament the execution of false prophets was by stoning (Deuteronomy 13:6-10; 18:20). Here the guilty will be thrust through by a sharp weapon.

The false prophet, nevertheless, would carry on his cheating business no more openly, wearing a prophet's rough garment, but disguised as a farmer. When it will be further asked, "What are these wounds in thine hands" (Hebrew: literally in between thine hands, i.e. on the upper body, on the chest), the answer the false prophet gives must refer to some disciplinary action taken by his parents. "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"

cannot refer to Christ's suffering, for He was not wounded in a house, but on the cross.

This refers rather to the false prophet himself, in counterfeit. While verse 6 refers to the false prophet, verse 7 refers definitely to our Lord. The words uttered here are spoken by the Lord of hosts. It is a prophecy on Jesus the Messiah, His shepherd, who will be under the sword, the power of the Roman government in judgment over Him. In contrast with the false prophet, the Messiah will be both Man and God. Being a **fellow** of God He is the second person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus applied "Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered" to Himself (Matthew 26:31), but the scattering covers not only His immediate disciples but also Israel as a nation, in the light of the whole prophecy. Though the sheep be scattered, "I will turn my hand on the little ones." The Lord will gather the remnants of Israel, an expression of His tender mercies on His chosen people.

"And it shall come to pass" suggests a great gap between verse 7 and verses 8, 9. Whereas the events of verse 7 refer to our Lord's death, those in verses 8, 9 look forward to the Great Tribulation immediately prior to Christ's Second Coming. Two-thirds of Israel will die in Antichrist's attack on Israel, and only one-third will survive to go into the Millennial Kingdom. This is God's purifying process which results in the survival of "the remnant," the believing part. The remnant are those who will be saved because they will call on the Name of the Lord.

Chapter XIV

Christ's Return To Save Israel And His Millennial Rule

This chapter describes in detail how the Messiah will come to save His own. The attack on Jerusalem cannot happen without His decretive will, hence it is said, "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (verse 2).

In counter-attacking the enemy, the Lord Himself will descend from out of the blue. He will land on the Mount of Olives, as also predicted by the two Angels on Ascension Day, to Jesus' disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

At the point of landing of the Saviour, an earthquake, God's E-Bomb, will split the Mount of Olives, eastwards and westwards. A great valley now appears while the hill slides to the north and south. This valley is God's provision for the remnants to escape through to Azal (probably on the eastern side of Jerusalem). The prophet compares this escape to an event also of an earthquake in the reign of King Uzziah, which event was mentioned by Amos, 200 years before Zechariah (Amos 1:1). In the intervening minutes of the remnant's escape the Lord will descend with all his saints — to set up His Kingdom.

In the confusion of war, with the discharge of guns and mortars and raining of bombs, the atmosphere will be so polluted that the light of day is shrouded as in twilight, or under a smog. This day will be a compound of day and night and known only to the Lord.

Suddenly living waters spring out of Jerusalem, which flows both to the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. This will be a perennial stream all the year round, summer and winter.

There is much talk in Israel today about bringing water from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea by cleaving the earth, i.e. the construction of a canal. Here is an official discussion:

The water inflow to the Dead Sea has been reduced over the years by about 75 percent, because of various water diversion schemes carried out both in Israel and Jordan. This, combined with its high evaporation rate, has resulted in an extensive drying-out process, especially at the southern, shallow end of the Dead Sea. A response to this situation is the proposed Mediterranean/Dead Sea Canal. Plans call for a water conduit about 65 miles long, a pumping station and a hydroelectric power plant, powered by the 1,000 foot drop needed to reach the low level of the Dead Sea. Implementation of the project would have far-reaching effects: not only would the water level of the Dead Sea be maintained, but the project would open up opportunities for further development of the Negev and Dead Sea regions, as well as adding to Israel's energy resources. (*Facts About Israel*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 1985)

Should this Mediterranean/Dead Sea Canal be constructed it might take Israel a decade to complete. With God, it is done in one minute by the Olivet Earthquake. For, as a result of the Quake we read in the following verse, "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be" (Zechariah 14:8). While man's A-Bomb or H(ell) Bomb is a deadly scorching fire, God's E-Bomb releases an everlasting life-giving stream.

The prophet Ezekiel sees living water coming out of Jerusalem more vividly in the day of Israel's restoration as follows:

Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed:

it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine. (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

The description above of the life-giving stream cannot be the same as Revelation 22:1,2. It is a picture of Israel, not in heaven, but on earth. For Engedi, a favourite tourist spot today, is mentioned, and Eneglaim, another geographical location.

Food for thought: Will Israel build the Canal to bring in water from the Mediterranean? Or will water issue from Jerusalem to flow to both the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, according to Zechariah's and Ezekiel's prophecies? We believe God's Word shall prevail.

There is a symbolic meaning to the living waters coming forth from Jerusalem after the Messiah's touchdown on earth. Here comes the Messiah to a sin-cursed earth, not only with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2) but reviving from His life-giving streams.

When the Prince of Peace is come to earth, He will be King over all peoples.

During the Millennium all the land from six miles north of Jerusalem (Geba) to 35 miles southwest (Rimmon) will be a plain, but Jerusalem will be raised up. Thus the living streams will be able to flow throughout the land, eastwards and westwards. The inhabitants of Jerusalem will dwell safely, free from all destruction. No more war between nations, as given in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

In retrospect, those who fought against Jerusalem had been punished with a weird pestilence wherein "their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth" (verse 12). One economical way of defeating the enemy is to cause a great suspicion within the allied army, so that the different national contingents will fight one another and cancel one another. God used this tactic in the allied invasion of Judah under

Jehosphaphat. The allied army of Ammon, Moab and Seir (Edom) suddenly fought among themselves. “For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped” (II Chronicles 20:23,24). In the end, Judah got the upper hand, and instead of being plundered, “they gathered booty from the heathen—gold, and silver and apparel, in great abundance” (verse 14).

The plague that consumed away the flesh of the enemy troops in the battle of Armageddon that ended up in Jerusalem fell also on the “horse, mule, camel and ass,” beasts of war, even into their tents.

All the Gentile nations that came to attack Jerusalem being thoroughly vanquished, they will now submit to the Messiah’s rule. They will come annually to worship before the King, the Lord of hosts and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles is one of the three big feasts, the others being Passover and Pentecost. The Feast of Tabernacles is the Feast of ingathering, joy, praise and thanksgiving. It was celebrated on the return of Israel from exile (Nehemiah 8:14-18). Every nation under the sun will be required to worship the Messiah in Jerusalem upon pain of no rain. As for Egypt, if she came not to worship and keep the Feast of Tabernacles, she will receive double — she shall be smitten also with a plague. The reason is Egypt has the Nile, so rain or no rain she can survive. Such a double punishment in Egypt will also extend to all nations that refuse to come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles before the Lord.

“Holiness unto the Lord” will be the theme of life in the Millennium and there will be no more Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts. No more unholy person, indeed, under His rule.

12. Malachi

From Haggai we jump to Malachi because Malachi's message is more akin to the other minor prophets we have studied thus far, while Zechariah stands out by itself by being an apocalyptic book with many visions on the last days of Israel.

Malachi is the last of the O.T. prophets. As Haggai and Zechariah exercised their ministry to Zerubbabel and Jeshua in the first return from exile, Malachi exercised his in the time of Nehemiah, the third return, particularly during Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem about 433 B.C. During this period, that is Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem, many things went wrong which are recorded in Nehemiah 13. These involved the sanctity of Temple worship, the offering of tithes, the keeping of the Sabbath and the mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles.

Malachi means "My Messenger." Nothing more is known of the prophet. But he was a strong and courageous man who spoke the truth without fear or favour. He plainly rebuked the people, even the priests, for their sins, calling a spade a spade.

Although the Temple was rebuilt a hundred years before, and a religious revival occurred under Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:28-39), the nation relapsed into their old ways of complacency and moral laxity. When Nehemiah returned from the Persian court to Jerusalem he saw "the dog return to their vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (II Peter 2:22). This incited both Governor (Nehemiah) and Prophet (Malachi) in a joint crusade against the culprits. Though the unrepentant argued back in a

sevenfold “Wherein” (1:2,6,7; 2:17; 3:7,8,13), they could not escape the four charges levelled against them by the prophet.

According to Scroggie they are as follows:

I. Religious

The people were all astray through the degeneracy of the priests. Hosea had said, ‘like people like priest’ (iv.9), but the order is here inverted to the utter shame of the Tribe of Levi. They called God their Father, but they did not honour Him; they said He was their Master, but they did not fear Him; on the contrary they went to the furthest extremes of profanity and sacrilege in their vaunted worship of Him. Polluted bread, blind, lame, and sick sacrifices, and grudging, greedy service, were what they brought Him. The prophet incisively says: ‘You would not dare to treat those who are over you in civil affairs as you are presuming to treat Jehovah your God; the very Gentiles, whom you despise, will be accepted before you.’ It is not enough that we worship, we must yield spiritual worship, for ‘God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.’

II. Moral

Sorcery, adultery, perjury, fraud, and oppression (iii.5) were rife at this time, and against these the Lord’s face is set; but the people had said, ‘Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them’, and, ‘where is the God of judgment?’ the Prophet then tells them plainly that the God of judgment will come and cast them all into the refining pot, and make the fire to burn fiercely until the dross is separated; a process of intense pain, but it must so be. Religion is spiritual, but it is also intensely ethical, a fact too often disbelieved or neglected in our own day. God has regard to all our social and civic relations, and injustice, bribery, and oppression will most surely receive their fitting recompense.

III. Social

One of the greatest sources of sin and corruption in the history of Israel had been their connection and compromises

with the strangers around them. They had been separated from the nations and placed in the midst of them in order to be a witness to Jehovah the One God, in contradistinction to prevailing polytheism; and in order to remain pure it was necessary that they married only within their own nation, for the introduction of strange wives often meant the introduction of false worship (c.f. I Kings xi.1-13). Ezra and Nehemiah both had spoken and acted very severely in regard to this, but the people fell back again into this sin and Malachi lifted up his voice in pointed denunciation. They were divorcing their Hebrew wives and marrying foreigners, and the tears of the divorced covered the altar, so that the Lord would have no further regard for the offerings of these cruel husbands. How could the seed be holy if the stock was unholy; and how could family blessing and prosperity be expected so long as a man dealt treacherously with the wife of his youth? With these charges and challenges the prophet made the people face their sin.

IV. Material

The offerings which went to the maintenance of the Levites had been stopped, and the tithes were not brought into the storehouse to the Lord, and poverty ensued. No doubt in many instances there was a literal observance of the precepts respecting the 'tenth', but the observance was perfunctory and grudging. The consequence was that, as in material things they dishonoured God, in material things they were made to suffer (ii.). When we become Christ's our money becomes His also, and while we may yield a part to Him consistently, it is only to indicate that the whole is His, and at His disposal. The value of a gift to the Lord is determined by the spirit of the giver, and he values our offerings according to what it costs us to bring them.

Malachi's indictment of the people was fourfold, Religious, Moral, Social, and Material, covering the whole life; and the judgment was in the ratio of the neglect.

There was, however, as there always will be, a faithful remnant who thought about God, and had fellowship with one another, and to them rich promises were made.

Then the Prophet concludes by referring back to Moses, exhorting to obedience of the law, and forward to Elijah (John the Baptist), by regarding whose message they would be spared the threatened curse.

The message of Malachi to his day is pre-eminently suited to our own, for each of the above abuses has its counterpart in the modern Church. How prevalent is 'a form of godliness' the power being denied; how weak are multitudes of Christians in respect to great moral questions; how frequent is the alliance in marriage of saved with unsaved; and how shamefully lax are the people of God in regard to the consecration of all that they are, and have. To all such the message of Malachi should come as a solemn warning.

At the end of the first Book of the Old Testament, we read of a 'coffin', and at the end of the last Book, of a 'curse', indicating that, as yet, all was failure; but the Second Man, the Lord from Glory having come, the New Testament ends in better terms, and its last note tells of wondrous 'grace'.

CHART 53**THE DIVIDED KINGDOM. B.C. 975-722: 253 Years**

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM		THE NORTHERN KINGDOM	
Judah	Name	Israel	
Nineteen and One Queen REHOBOAM-HEZEKIAH (6th)	KINGS	Nineteen JEROBOAM-HOSHEA	
JERUSALEM	CAPITAL	SAMARIA	
One	DYNASTIES	Nine	
Two (mainly)	TRIBES	Ten	
Good. Unstable. Bad. (5) (3) (12)	CHARACTER OF KINGS	All Bad	
NEBUCHADNEZZAR	CONQUEROR	SHALMANESER. SARGON	
BABYLONIA	PLACE OF CAPTIVITY	ASSYRIA	
A Large Return	AFTERWARDS	No Return	

(From *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, W. Graham Scroggie)

CHART 60

CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF THE KINGS				
JUDAH		ISRAEL		
KING	REIGN	KING	REIGN	DYN.
Rehoboam	17	Jeroboam I	22	I
Abijam	3			
Asa	41	Nadab	2	
		Baasha	24	II
		Elah	2	
		Zimri	7 days	III
		Omri	12	IV
		(Tibni)	(5)	
		Ahab	22	
Jehoshaphat	25	Ahaziah	2	
		Joram	12	
Jehoram	8			
Ahaziah	1			
Athaliah	6	Jehu	28	V
Jehoash	40			
		Jehoahaz	17	
		Joash	16	
Amaziah	29			
		Jeroboam II	41	
Azariah (Uzziah)	52			
		(INTERREGNUM 11)		
		Zechariah	6 months	
		Shallum	1 month	VI
		Menahem	10	VII
		Pekahiah	2	
		Pekah	20	VIII
Jotham	16			
Ahaz	16			
		(INTERREGNUM 9)		
Hezekiah	to 6th year	Hoshea	9	IX

CHART 92

THE RELATIONS OF THE PROPHETS	
1. TO ONE ANOTHER	
NORTH	Jonah. Amos. Hosea. Micah.
SOUTH	Joel. ISAIAH. Micah. Nahum. Zephaniah. JEREMIAH. Habakkuk. Daniel. Obadiah. EZEKIEL. Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi.
2. TO THE EMPIRES	
PRE-ASSYRIAN	Joel.
ASSYRIAN	Jonah. Amos. Hosea. ISAIAH. Micah. Nahum. Zephaniah.
ASSYRIAN and BABYLONIAN	JEREMIAH.
BABYLONIAN	Habakkuk. Obadiah. EZEKIEL.
BABYLONIAN and MEDO-PERSIAN	Daniel.
MEDO-PERSIAN	Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi.
3. TO THE CAPTIVITY	
BEFORE B.C. 850-606	NORTH. Jonah. Amos. Hosea. Micah. SOUTH. Joel. ISAIAH. Micah. Nahum. Zephaniah. JEREMIAH. Habakkuk.
DURING B.C. 606-536	Daniel. Obadiah. EZEKIEL.
AFTER B.C. 536-425 (?)	Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi.



THE MINOR PROPHETS, numbering twelve, are so-called not because they are of less importance than the four Major Prophets. They are called Minor Prophets because they are shorter in length than the Major Prophets, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.

The sixteen Prophets may be divided into four groups.

- (1) Prophets of the Northern Kingdom, viz., Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah.
- (2) Prophets of the Southern Kingdom, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
- (3) Prophets of the Captivity, viz., Ezekiel and Daniel.
- (4) Prophets of the Return, viz., Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

What are the characteristics of the prophetic ministry? The prophets are primarily spokesmen of God. They were raised of God to denounce the sins of God's people, the children of Israel, for their grave apostasy and to cause them to repent. The prophets were revivalists to the wayward Jewish church.

However, God, being a covenant God, would forgive them for the promises made to their fathers. Hence the prophetic utterances looking forward to the time of their final Restoration.

Israel will be delivered from the dispersion to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem will rise again to the top of the world. David's Greater Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will sit upon the throne of His father and rule the earth for a thousand years of peace.

The study of Zechariah is especially vital for us, living in the last of the last days, before His Return. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Timothy Tow



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