



Major and Minor Prophets

**Jet Witherspoon Toole
An Overseas Ministries
Publication**

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By

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Foreword

For over fifty years, Mrs. Jet Witherspoon Toole blessed the constituency of the United Pentecostal Church with her anointed pulpit and writing ministry. Over twenty years were spent as an instructor at Pentecostal Bible Institute, Tupelo, Mississippi, and Conquerors Bible College, Portland, Oregon. Even when she retired and her active ministry was curtailed, she continued to draw from her vast knowledge of God's Word and penned *Minor Prophets*, *The Tabernacle*, *Romans*, and *Christian Living for the Overseas Ministries Training Course*. These four books are now joined by this volume, *Major Prophets*, which are based on the thorough lecture notes that Sister Toole prepared for her class.

Sister Toole's natural vision is now dim, her ministry continues. It is now multiplied many times over as the foreign missionaries – many of whom are her former students – use her textbooks and what she taught in word and example in her classroom to teach their own Bible school students.

Sister Toole has obeyed Paul's instruction to Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me ... the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). May we who have been influenced by Sister Toole's love and knowledge of God's Word follow her example and continue to commit eternal truths to other faithful people.

Dorsey L. Burk
Editor

Introduction

There are four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are not called major prophets because their prophecies are more important, but because their books are longer than those of the minor prophets:

We will study the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah – including *Lamentations* – and Ezekiel. Daniel's prophecies should be studied in conjunction with the New Testament's book of prophecy, *Revelation*.

To understand the utterances of the prophets, a person needs to be familiar with the whole history of Israel. It is necessary to be acquainted with the political and religious

conditions that prevailed at the time of each prophet's ministry to understand his prophecy fully.

The mission of the prophets was twofold. The first function of each was to testify against the sins of his own time. His second and even more important objective was to foretell the future. The prophets predicted the future in light of the present and often predicted the distant future (end time) in light of the near future. This is called the "Law of Double Reference."

Utterances of the prophets centered around four historical points:

1. their present time
2. the empires of Assyria and Babylon
3. the coming of Messiah
4. the Millennium

A careful study of the context and the historical background of the prophecies help to determine to which of these four events each passage refers.

Each of the prophets presented the twofold character of Christ. They pictured a suffering Messiah, as in Isaiah 53, and also a reigning, triumphant Messiah, as in Isaiah 11. The two strands of Messianic prophecy were interwoven in such manner, however, that even the prophets did not understand exactly how they would be fulfilled (I Peter 1:8-12).

In the prophecies, Christ's suffering and reigning often seemed to be contemporaneous, but the New Testament has revealed the interval between His first and second advents. It has also revealed the two phases of His reign. He reigns in the hearts and lives of His people now, but during the Millennium, He shall reign in all His kingdom glory.

Isaiah

I. Introduction

Many Bible students consider Isaiah to be the greatest of the prophets and his prophecies the most beautiful and sublime. Of all the prophets, he gave the most glorious and complete view of Messiah and His kingdom. Because of its detailed prophecies of Messiah and His work of redemption, the Book of Isaiah has been called the fifth Gospel and its author the evangelist of the Old Testament. The name Isaiah means "salvation of Jehovah." Isaiah 6 records his divine calling to the prophetic ministry. He prophesied for approximately sixty-two years – 760 to 698 B.C. – under the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah – II Kings 14:21-22), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He ministered in Judah and principally to Judah, although he also had a message for Israel (the ten northern tribes). The northern

kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria under the reign of Hoshea, about 721 B.C., during the reign of Ahaz over Judah.

Tradition states that the wicked king Manasseh caused Isaiah's death by putting him into a hollow log, which was then sawed asunder. See Hebrews 11:37.

The historical background for Isaiah's prophecy is found in II Chron. 26-32. (The student should note the distinction between the historical backgrounds of Isaiah's prophecy and the historical section of the Book of Isaiah.)

II. Overview of Book

A. Condemnatory Section (Isaiah 1-35)

This section is concerned primarily with rebukes for Judah's sins.

Isaiah 1-12 Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem

Isaiah 13:23 Prophecies of judgment on the nations

Isaiah 24-27 Prophecies of world judgment, ending in Israel's redemption

Isaiah 28-35 Prophecies of judgment and mercy

B. Historical Section (Isaiah 36-39)

This section contains a part of Judah's history under the reign of Hezekiah. Isaiah 39:5-8 is a prophecy of the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 36-39 Invasion of Judah by Assyria and Judah's deliverance

C. Consolatory Section (Isaiah 40-66)

This section contains words of comfort to chastised Israel and promises restoration and blessings.

Isaiah 40-48 Deliverance from captivity through the agency of Cyrus

Isaiah 49-57 Redemption through the suffering and sacrifice of Christ

Isaiah 58-66 The future glory of God's redeemed people

III. A Brief Resume of the Chapters

Isaiah 1 portrays the sinful condition of Judah at the time of Isaiah's prophecy. If it had not been for a small remnant of the faithful, the nation would have been totally destroyed, even as Sodom and Gomorrah were (verse 9). But in spite of their sinful condition, God promised redemption for His people.

Isaiah 2 promises salvation for the faithful in the end time (verses 1-5), but God promised to humble and punish the proud and idolatrous (verses 6-22).

Isaiah 3 looks ahead of the fall of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins (verses 1-9). It promises righteous judgment and justice to the wicked as well as the righteous (verses 10-15). Verses 16-26 picture the sinful pride of the women and predict their judgment.

Isaiah 4 is a vision of the future glory of the kingdom of God. His people will be redeemed from their wickedness.

Isaiah 5 gives a parable of the Lord's vineyard that shows the unfaithfulness of both Israel and Judah (verses 1-7). (Compare with John 15:1-7.) Verses 8-30 announce six woes of God's judgment on the people for their sins.

Isaiah 6 describes Isaiah's vision and call to the prophetic ministry and predicts the people's rejection of his message and their judgment (verses 1-13).

Isaiah 7 records the evil confederacy of the king of Israel (ten tribes) with the king of Syria. God sent Isaiah with a message to Ahaz, king of Judah. The main prophecy of this chapter is verse 14, which announces that Messiah would be born of a virgin and His name would be called Immanuel. (See Matthew 1:21-23)

Isaiah 8 predicts the Assyria invasion of Judah and gives warning to the people of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah 9 is a beautiful prophecy of Messiah and His accomplishment. Note especially verses 6 and 7.

Isaiah 10 predicts God's judgment on Assyria and Samaria, while promising that Judah would also be punished for her sins of idolatry. But He promised salvation for the righteous remnant.

Isaiah 11 portrays briefly the peace and righteousness of the millennial reign.

Isaiah 12 is the beautiful prophecy that Jehovah would become our salvation in Messiah and mentions that His name would be exalted. (See Philippians 2:9-10)

Isaiah 12-27 consists mostly of judgments pronounced against the various nations. By God's judgment the inhabitants would learn righteousness (26:9). In His final judgment on the nations, God promised to hide His people away in a place of safety (26:20-21), which is apparently the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9; I Cor. 15:51-57; I Thess. 4:13-18). Israel's own efforts to save itself were compared to a bed too short for a man to stretch himself on and a covering too narrow to wrap himself in (28:20). The only covering that hid Israel's sins was the covering of God's Spirit that would be provided in Christ (30:1). The people of Israel were bringing God's judgment upon themselves by going to Egypt and turning to the arm

of flesh for help (31:1-3). The only hiding place from the tempests of judgment and storms of life was the promised King who would come to reign in righteousness.

Isaiah 34:1-8 pictures God's wrath upon the nations in the Battle of Armageddon. (See Rev. 19:11-12)

Isaiah 35:8 describe the way (road) to heaven that God would provide in Christ as a highway of holiness (see John 14:1-6).

Isaiah 36-39 (the historical section) tells of the Assyrian's invasion of Judah, God's deliverance in answer to Hezekiah's prayers, Hezekiah's sickness and recovery, and the king's folly of pride in showing his treasures to foreign visitors.

Isaiah 40 promises the forerunner of Christ (John the Baptist – compare verses 3-8 with Luke 3:4-6). Then it portrays the greatness of the Lord who would come (verses 9-28) and the greatness of the salvation he would bring to humanity (verses 29-31).

Isaiah 41-48 emphasizes that there is just one God and that he is the Savior of His people (42:8; 43:10-17; 44:6; 45:5; 46:9-10; 48:5, 12-13). *Isaiah 41:2*, *44:24-28*, and *45:1* speak of the Persian king Cyrus by whom God would deliver His people from Babylonian captivity. (See Ezra 1:1, 11.) The remarkable thing about this prophecy is that the prophet called his name about 150 years before his birth.

Isaiah 49-57 is primarily concerned with the coming of Messiah and the salvation He would provide through suffering. His name would be announced before His birth. (Compare *49:1* with Matt. 1:21.) His word would be as a sharp sword. (Compare *49:2* and *50:4* with He. 4:12 and John 7:46.) *Isaiah 50:6-9*, *52:14*, and *53:1-12* describe His suffering. *Isaiah 51:9-11*, *52:1-12*, *55:1-3*, and *57:15-19* describe the joy and blessings of the salvation He would provide for men through His suffering.

Isaiah 58 shows that religious ceremony is not sufficient to save and that God only hears the prayers of those who turn away from sin.

Isaiah 59 shows that the sins of men had separated them from God (verses 1-9) and that no one but the Lord could save them from their sins (verses 16-21).

Isaiah 61:1-2 is the text that Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Isaiah 56:6-7, *63:16*, and *65:1* foretell that God would receive the Gentiles.

Isaiah 66:20-42 closes Isaiah's prophecies with the promise of new heavens and a new earth in the

consummation of God's salvation of His people. (See II Peter 3:10-14.)

Study Questions on Isaiah

1. What was Israel's sinful condition as picture Isaiah 1? What spiritual restoration was predicted?
2. What was said of Israel's idolatry in Isaiah 2? What judgment did God pronounce on Israel for her idolatry?
3. What picture of the women's vanity was given in Isaiah 3?
4. What picture of restoration was given in Isaiah 4?
5. What interpretation was given of the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5? What comparison may be drawn between this parable and Jesus' teaching in John 15:1-7?
6. For what six sins was woe pronounced on Isaiah in Isaiah 5?
7. Describe Isaiah's vision and call to the prophetic ministry as given in Isaiah 6
8. What important prophecy of Christ was given in Isaiah 7? What was its New Testament fulfillment? Give the Scripture reference.
9. What invasion was predicted in Isaiah 8? What was the Lord's provision for Israel's deliverance?
10. What important prophecy about Christ was given in Isaiah 9? How was Christ identified in this prophecy?
11. What punishment for Israel's sin did the Lord promise in Isaiah 11?
12. What was prophesied of Assyria in Isaiah 10? What hope was held out to Israel?
13. What picture of the Lord's future kingdom is given in Isaiah 11?
14. What was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 12?
15. What was prophesied of Babylon in Isaiah 13? To what does this Babylon refer (verse 11)? To what does the "day of the LORD" refer (verse 9)?
16. What consolation is held out to Israel in Isaiah 14?
17. What is shown to be the origin of Babylon's pride and evil in Isaiah 14?
18. To what does the destruction of Babylon refer in Isaiah 14?
19. What is prophesied of Moab in Isaiah 15-16? Who were the Moabites?
20. What was prophesied of Damascus in Isaiah 17? What nation did Damascus represent?
21. On what nation was woe pronounced in Isaiah 18?
22. On what nation was woe pronounced in Isaiah 19?
23. What was indicated by Isaiah's pronouncement of judgment on the many different nations? (See Daniel 2:31-45.)
24. What nation did the Lord ordain to destroy Egypt and Ethiopia in Isaiah 20?
25. In Isaiah 21, what nation did the Lord ordain it destroy Babylon?

26. What is the interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah 22? (See II Chron. 32:1-5, 30.)
27. Against what country was judgment predicted in Isaiah 23?
28. To what does the prophecy of Isaiah 24 refer? (See Rev. 19:11-17.)
29. Give Scripture references that help to interpret the prophecy of Isaiah 25.
30. What was God's purpose in judgment, as revealed in Isaiah 26? Of what were verses 20&21 prophetic?
31. What restoration of Israel was predicted in Isaiah 27?
32. What captivity and restoration was pictured in Isaiah 28? What is the interpretation of verse 20?
33. Give New Testament interpretations of the prophecy of Isaiah 29.
34. What were the people of Israel warned against in Isaiah 30-31? What deliverance was promised to them?
35. What restoration was promised in Isaiah 32?
36. What was pictured in Isaiah 33?
37. What was pictured in Isaiah 34?
38. What was pictured in Isaiah 35?
39. What of Judah's history was recorded in the historical section of Isaiah 36-39? What was God's answer, through Isaiah, to the Assyrian threat? How did God fulfill His promise (Isaiah 37)?
40. What was Hezekiah's folly as recorded in Isaiah 39?
41. Of whom did Isaiah prophecy in Isaiah 40:1-5?
42. How did Isaiah picture the Lord in Isaiah 40:9-31?
43. What was shown of the weakness of men in Isaiah 41? What was shown to be the hope of weak men?
44. What New Testament passage interprets the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1-12?
45. What two aspects of Israel's restoration are shown in Isaiah 43? To what does verse 27 refer?
46. What is emphasized in Isaiah 44-46?
47. What was prophesied about Cyrus in Isaiah 44:24-28 and 45:1-4? When and how was this prophecy fulfilled?
48. In Isaiah 47 to what does the judgment of Babylon refer? (See Rev. 17:1-18.)
49. In Isaiah 49, what judgment was pronounced on Israel and what promise was given?
50. What New Testament passage interprets the prophecy about Christ in Isaiah 49?
51. What was the fulfillment of the prophecy about Christ in Isaiah 50?
52. In Isaiah 51, what does the prophecy about Israel refer?
53. Give New Testament interpretations of the prophecies of Isaiah 52.
54. How was the prophecy of Isaiah 53 minutely fulfilled?
55. What restoration of Israel was prophesied in Isaiah 54? (See Rev. 7:1-8.)
56. What picture of salvation in Christ was given in Isaiah 55?
57. Name some of the admonitions given in Isaiah 56.
58. What rebukes and what promises were given in Isaiah 57?
59. How was Israel's hypocrisy pictured in Isaiah 58?
60. What picture of the lost was given in Isaiah 59? What was shown to be man's only hope?
61. In Isaiah 60, how was the salvation of Christ shown to be universal?
62. What was the New Testament fulfillment of Isaiah 61?
63. What was prophesied of Israel in Isaiah 62?
64. In Isaiah 63, to what do verses 1-6 refer? To what do verses 7-19 refer? To what does verse 16 refer?
65. In Isaiah 64, what did Isaiah predict of the future attitude of the people of Israel toward their need? What situation was to bring them to this attitude?
66. In Isaiah 66, what was shown to be God's requirement for salvation? What was shown to be His provision of salvation?

Jeremiah

I. Introduction

Jeremiah was the son of a priest from Anathoth. (Anathoth was located about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.) He began prophesying during the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign and continued until the captivity of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians about forty years later (Jeremiah 1:2-3). He is called the weeping prophet because of the great burden he carried for his own people.

II. Historical Background

We shall briefly study the years of Jeremiah's prophecy under the reign of each of the kings of Judah from Josiah to Zedekiah. This historical information is found in II Kings 22-25 and II Chron. 34-36.

A. Josiah (II Kings 22:1; II Chron. 34:1)

Josiah reigned eighteen years. He was a good and faithful king. At the age of sixteen he began to seek the Lord, and when he was twenty years old, in the twelfth year of his reign, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry (II Chron. 34:1-7). He then ordered the renovation and repair of the Temple, in the process of which the book of the law of Moses was found (II Kings 22:3-10; II Chron. 34:8-10). Evidently the law had not been read to the people of Judah for many years, and Josiah rent his clothes out of great concern when he became conscious, through the hearing of the law, of the sinfulness of the people. He sent priests to inquire of the Lord. The Lord answered through the prophetess Huldah that He would judge the people for their sins, but due to Josiah's

faithfulness, the judgment would not fall during his lifetime (II Kings 22:11-20; II Chron. 34:18-28).

Josiah then read the law to all the people and zealously tried to stamp out idolatry in Judah. He held the greatest Passover feast that the people had known in many years (II Kings 23:1-25; II Chron. 34:29-33; 35:1-19).

Nevertheless, he seems to have made one mistake. The Egyptians pharaoh marched through the land on his way to wage war against Assyria. Josiah, evidently against the will of God, encountered him in battle in Megiddo. Josiah was killed in this battle, and his son Jehoahaz was crowned king of Judah (II Kings 23:31-33; II Chron. 35:20-27; 36:1-2).

B. Jehoahaz, son of Josiah (II Kings 23:31-33; II Chron. 36:1-3).

Jehoahaz had reigned only three months when Judah was subjugated by the pharaoh of Egypt. He was carried to Egypt where he died.

C. Jehoiakim, son of Josiah and the same as Eliakim (II Kings 23:34-36; II Chron. 36:4-8)

Pharaoh-nechoh bound Judah under tribute and made Jehoahaz's brother, Eliakim, of Judah, changing his name to Jehoiakim (II Kings 23:32-32; II Chron. 36:1-5). Jehoiakim became a very wicked king and persecuted Jeremiah.

After three or four years, Nebuchadnezzar gained power over most of the territory held by Assyria and Egypt. He subjugated Judah and brought Jehoiakim under his jurisdiction. Three years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. He was arrested, and plans were made to carry him to Babylon. However, it appears that he was not taken to Babylon but reigned in Jerusalem about another five years, the overall period of his reign being eleven years (II Kings 24:1-7; II Chron. 36:5-8; Jer. 25:1-3; Dan. 1:1-2). The vessels and treasures that Nebuchadnezzar carried to Babylon at this time were probably given to him as tax by Jehoiakim. And some of the best of the young men of Judah, including Daniel and his friends, were taken to Babylon at this time (Dan. 1:1-7).

D. Jehoiakim (II Kings 24:6-10; II Chron. 36:8-10)

When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin became king of Judah. He had reigned only three months when Nebuchadnezzar's armies again besieged Jerusalem. Jehoiachin gave himself up to them, and his family, and his officials were taken to Babylon (II Kings 24:8-16; II Chron. 36:9-10). Evidently Ezekiel was also taken to

Babylon with this group, approximately five years after Daniel had been taken to Babylon.

E. Zedekiah (II Kings 24:17-19; II Chron. 36:10-12; Jer. 37:1-2)

Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah king of Judah in place of Jehoiachin and changed his name to Zedekiah (II Kings 24:17-19; II Chron. 36:10). He was a son of Josiah and brother to Jehoiakim (Jer. 37:1). Zedekiah reigned eleven years, till the fall of Jerusalem. He came to Jeremiah secretly on various occasions to inquire of the will of the lord. He was too weak, however, to take a stand against the princes of his court. He finally yielded to their pressure to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar in spite of Jeremiah's warning against such action (Jer. 37:11-21; 38:2-28). When Zedekiah rebelled in the ninth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies to besiege Jerusalem. In less than two years, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, Jerusalem was taken and destroyed (II Kings 25:1-21; II Chron. 36:11-21; Jer. 39:1-12; 40:2-6).

III. A Brief Resume of the Chapters

Jeremiah 1:4-10 records Jeremiah's call to the prophetic ministry. It appears he was called when quite young, since he called himself a child (verse 6).

Jeremiah 2:1-3:5 is Jeremiah's first message to the Jews. He rebuked the unfaithfulness of the priests and kings, the false prophets, and the idolatry of the people. He charged them with two evils: forsaking the Lord and substituting idols in His place (2:13). He said the noble vine God had planted had degenerated into a strange or wild vine (2:1). (See Isaiah 5:2.)

Jeremiah 3:6-6:30 is Jeremiah's second message. He rebuked Judah for disregarding the warning of the captivity of her sister Israel (the ten tribes). Judah had blindly followed in the footsteps of Israel in her idolatry (3:6-11).

Jeremiah called the people to repent (3:12-25; 4:1-4). Yet, since he knew there would be no permanent repentance, he pronounced their doom (4:7-13). They pretended to worship the Lord Jehovah while continuing in their wicked ways (5:1-15). He called them to remember and return to their former state of faith and blessing, but they refused to heed his pleading (6:16-17).

Jeremiah 7-10 gives Jeremiah's message in the gate of the Lord's house. He rebuked the people for believing the lying prophets who promised a false security (7:4-10). He warned that God would permit them to be destroyed even as He had permitted the Philistines to carry the ark away from the Tabernacle in Shiloh (7:12-14). He said when their enemies destroyed Jerusalem they would dishonor

Judah by taking the bones of their kings and princes from the tombs and scattering them in the open (8:1-3).

Jeremiah expressed his own grief over Judah's sinful condition (8:18-22; 9:1-2). He pronounced God's judgment on Judah as well as on all the other nations (9:23-26). He rebuked the people for trusting in lifeless idols that could do neither good nor evil while they forsook the living God who created all things (10:1-13). He acknowledged that due to carnality they could not make themselves righteous (10:23-24).

Jeremiah 11-12 contains Jeremiah's message of the broken covenant. This was prompted by the finding of the book of the law in the renovation of the Temple by Josiah. The law revealed that Judah was under great condemnation for having broken the law of God (1:1-13). The people would be punished for persecuting God's prophet (11:18-23). They were to be carried into captivity, but when they repented God would bring them back again (12:15). However, during their captivity they should spread the doctrine of one true God among the heathen (12:16).

Jeremiah 13 is Jeremiah's message that he illustrated by the sign of the linen girdle. As his girdle was spoiled by being buried in the hole of a rock by the Euphrates River, so Judah would be buried among the heathens of the country of the Euphrates because they had failed to cling to the Lord as a girdle should bind the garment (13:1-11). But Judah could no more make herself righteous than an Ethiopian could change his skin or a leopard his spots (13:23).

Jeremiah 14-15 warns Judah of a coming drought and other judgments. (See Deu. 28:15; 23:24.) Jeremiah had to battle against the influence of false prophets who denied that these things would come to pass (14:13-16). When he interceded for the people, the Lord told him they had gone so far in sin that even if Moses and Samuel were there to intercede, He would not spare them (15:1, 6). However, He promised to save the small righteous remnant (15:11-21).

Jeremiah 16:1-17:18 gives Jeremiah's message in which he used his own unmarried state to emphasize the nearness of Judah's destruction (16:1-9). Again he warned the people against trusting in the arm of flesh, but he promised that God would try their hearts and bless all who trusted in Him (17:5, 7, 9-10).

Jeremiah 17:19-27 warns against breaking the Sabbath, which was a sign of God's covenant with Israel and a type of their eternal rest.

Jeremiah 18:1-19:13 records Jeremiah's learning in the potter's house how God would take the marred people of Judah and either save or destroy them according to their

attitude. He could do with them as He willed, even as the potter with the clay.

Jeremiah 19:14-20:18 portrays Jeremiah's reaction to his first persecution. He first thought he would cease giving out the message of judgment that had brought on his persecution, but the Word of God became like a fire shut up in his bones. He could not be silent (20:7-9).

Jeremiah 21-22 relates Jeremiah's answer to Zedekiah's inquiry concerning Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. He answered that if Judah repented of her sins she could be spared, but if she did not the kingdom would surely be given to the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 23:4-6 promises the coming of Israel's righteous King and Messiah, through whom they would be redeemed and made righteous. The remainder of the chapter warns against relying on false security promised by lying prophets.

Jeremiah 24 describes good and bad figs. By these signs, God showed that the repentant Jews would be restored but the wicked ones would be destroyed.

Jeremiah 25:10-11 predicts Israel's repentance in Babylon and their restoration after seventy years of captivity (Psalms 126 and 137).

Jeremiah 26 relates the priests' decision to kill Jeremiah. Nevertheless, he was saved by the pleading of the princes and the people, who used the example of Micah's prophecy in the days of Hezekiah (26:11-19).

Jeremiah 27-28 recounts how Jeremiah predicted Judah's subjugation by Babylon using the sign of a yoke, but it promises deliverance in the day (or reign) of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson (27:7).

Jeremiah 29 tells of Jeremiah's letter of warning and comfort to the captive already in Babylon.

Jeremiah 30 records God's command to Jeremiah to write all the words of God in a book. When the people returned from captivity, this book would confirm the truth and fulfillment of all the Word of God.

Jeremiah 31 gives the Lord's promise that the captives would return from Babylon and rebuild and worship in their land. The long-range view promised spiritual restoration through the new covenant of Messiah (31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-12).

Jeremiah 32 demonstrates Jeremiah's faith in God's promise of restoration by his redeeming the inheritance of his uncle's son (verses 6-18).

Jeremiah 33 records the Lord's promise that He would cause His people to return from captivity. He again promised final deliverance through the Branch of the house of David (verses 15-18). This promise was as sure as His covenant of day and night (verses 19-26).

Jeremiah 34 describes how that, in the face of a Babylonian siege and an earlier deportation, Zedekiah made a covenant to release Hebrew slaves. But when Babylon lifted the siege for a time, he retracted his covenant and God again pronounced destruction on Judah.

Jeremiah 35 contrasts the disobedience of Judah with the obedience of the Rechabites (Kenites) to the command of their elders. (See I Cor. 2:55.)

Jeremiah 36 recounts that when Jeremiah was shut up in prison during the reign of Jehoiakim, he called for Baruch to write his prophetic words and read them in the house of the Lord. Jehoiakim burned the roll (book) of God's Word, but Jeremiah dictated all the words to Baruch again and added a judgment against Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah 37-38 records that when the Babylonian siege was lifted briefly, Jeremiah was again imprisoned and put in a dungeon. Through secret counsel with Zedekiah, he was taken out of the dungeon, placed in the court of the prison, and given a daily ration of bread. When he continued to prophesy the fall of Jerusalem, he was again put in a dungeon. Nevertheless, Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, interceded with the king and saved Jeremiah from death in the dungeon.

Jeremiah 39-40 depicts Jerusalem's fall, Zedekiah's death, Jeremiah's deliverance, Ebed-melech's reward, and Gedaliah's is being made governor by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 41 reports that Ishmael, a traitor, assassinated Gedaliah and that the remnant of Jews, fearing they would be punished by Nebuchadnezzar, made plans to flee to Egypt.

Jeremiah 42-44 shows that the fearful Jews asked Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord if they should go to Egypt. As they had already determined to go, they disregarded his advice not to go. They took Jeremiah and Baruch with them into Egypt. In Tahpanhes, Egypt, Jeremiah continued to prophesy to the rebellious Jews. He told them that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Egypt and all who had fled there for safety would meet the same judgment and destruction that had fallen on Jerusalem. They boldly defied him and deliberately went after idols until they were destroyed according to Jeremiah's prophecy.

Jeremiah 45 is a message of comfort to Baruch in the days of Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah 46-51 is Jeremiah's messages of judgment against the Gentile nations. These messages look ahead to the destruction of all worldly powers by the Lord at Armageddon (Dan. 2:40-45). As both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied, Babylon was destroyed by the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:1-31). And by the law of double reference, this prophecy foreshadows the end-time destruction of the kingdom of Antichrist, which is also called Babylon (Rev. 17-19).

Jeremiah 52 records the destruction of Jerusalem and the kindness shown to Jehoiachin in his latter days by Evil-merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar.

Study Questions on Jeremiah

1. Describe Jeremiah's call to the prophetic ministry.
2. What was Jeremiah's first message to the Jews? With what two evils did he charge them? What did he say about the noble vine of God?
3. What was Jeremiah's second message of the Jews? Why did he rebuke Judah? What promise did he give?
4. What was Jeremiah's message in the gate of the Lord's house? For what two reasons did he rebuke the people? How did he express his own grief over Judah's sinful condition? What judgment did he pronounce on Judah?
5. What prompted the message of the broken covenant? What punishment was pronounced on the nation? Why? What promise was given?
6. What is the significance of the sign of the linen girdle?
7. Why did Jeremiah have to battle the false prophets? What did the Lord tell him concerning the condition of the people? What promise did the Lord give (15:11-21)?
8. What was the significance of Jeremiah's unmarried state as it related to Judah? What did he warn the people against?
9. The Sabbath was a sign of what?
10. What lesson did Jeremiah learn in the potter's house?
11. What was Jeremiah's reaction to his first persecution?
12. What was Jeremiah's answer to Zedekiah's inquiry concerning Nebuchadnezzar's invasion?
13. What promise was given concerning the coming of Israel's righteous King and Messiah?
14. What was shown by the sign of the good and bad figs?
15. What did Jeremiah predict in Jeremiah 25:10-11?
16. How was Jeremiah saved from the priests who determined to kill him?

17. What was shown by the sign of the yoke? What promise was given?
18. What was Jeremiah commanded to write in a book? What was the future purpose of the book?
19. What promise was given concerning the captives in Jeremiah 31? What was the long-range spiritual promise?
20. How did Jeremiah demonstrate his faith in God's promise of restoration?
21. What promises were given in Jeremiah 33?
22. Who were the Rechabites (Kenites)? Contrast their with Judah's.
23. Who was Baruch? What happened to his book?
24. How was Jeremiah delivered from the dungeon?
25. Describe the fall of Jerusalem.
26. Who was Ishmael of Jeremiah 41? Why did the remnant of the Jews decide to flee to Egypt?
27. What did the Jews ask Jeremiah in Jeremiah 42? What did Jeremiah continue to do in Egypt? What was the reaction of the Jews?
28. What message was given to Baruch in Jeremiah 45?
29. What messages are recorded in Jeremiah 46-51? According to the law of double reference, what do these messages foreshadow?
30. Describe Jehoiachin's treatment by Evil-merodach.

Lamentations

I. Introduction

The book of Lamentations is an appendix to Jeremiah's prophecy. In it he expressed his heartbreak and sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem and the miseries and desolations of God's people. The main object of the book was to cause the Jews to realize that their calamities were God's chastening for the purpose of turning them back to Himself in true repentance.

This book is still used by the Jews to express their sorrow over the sufferings and dispersion of Israel. They read Lamentations yearly to commemorate the burning of the Temple. And in the ninth month of Ab, which corresponds to our July, they read Lamentations aloud in all the Jewish synagogues. They have also used Lamentations as they wailed before the Wailing in Jerusalem.

II. A Brief Resume of the Chapters

Lamentations 1 pictures the city of Jerusalem and the people of Judah as a weeping widow. The chapter depicts Judah's grief. (See Psalm 137:1-6.)

Lamentations 2 pictures the city and the people as a veiled woman mourning over the ruins. It depicts Judah's humiliation.

Lamentations 3 pictures Jeremiah's great sorrow as he put himself in the place of the people as their intercessor. It points to Judah's cause for hope by recognizing the justice of God's chastisement.

Lamentations 4 likens the destruction of the glorious Jerusalem and the degraded state of the once holy people to gold that is dimmed and degraded. It shows that Judah's punishment corresponded to the extent of her backsliding.

Lamentations 5 pictures the people as repentant and pleading with the Lord for forgiveness. It depicts Judah's repentance in Babylon.

Study Questions on Lamentations

1. What is the relationship of Lamentations to Jeremiah's prophecy?
2. What is the main objective of the book?
3. How do the Jews still use the book?
4. What does the weeping widow symbolize and depict?
5. What does the veiled woman mourning over the ruins symbolize and depict?
6. What does Jeremiah's role as intercessor point to in Lamentations 3?
7. What does the dimmed and degraded gold symbolize in Lamentations 4?
8. What depicts Judah's repentance in Babylon?

Ezekiel

I. Introduction

The historical background for the first part of Ezekiel's prophecy is found in II Kings 24-25. He was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3) who was carried into Babylon at the same time that King Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, was taken captive to Babylon (II Kings 24:11-17). Five years later (Ezekiel 1:2), God called him to prophesy to the captives in Babylon. He prophesied from about six years before the fall of Jerusalem until about fifteen years after its destruction and the final deportation of the Jews to Babylon.

Before the fall of Jerusalem he prophesied that God would give the city and its people into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. After Jerusalem fell, he sought to console the captive Jews with promises of their future restoration.

Tradition says he was finally put to death by a Jewish captive whom he had rebuked for his idolatry.

II. A Brief Resume of the Chapters

Ezekiel 1: In preparing for his ministry, Ezekiel was given a symbolic vision of the future glory of God's redeemed people. (See Revelation 4-5.)

Ezekiel 2-3: God commissioned Ezekiel to prophesy to the captives of Israel in Babylon and impressed upon him his responsibility to obey this call.

Ezekiel 4: By the sign of a tile and an iron pan (verses 13), Ezekiel portrayed the siege of Jerusalem. By lying on his left on side for 390 days (a day for a year), he signified Israel's period of idolatry, and by lying on his right side for forty days, he signified the period of Judah's idolatry, for which idolatry God let both nations be taken into captivity (verse 48). By weighing his bread and measuring his water, he signified that famine would prevail during the siege of Jerusalem (verses 9-17).

Ezekiel 5: By cutting his hair, dividing it, and weighing it, Ezekiel signified the destruction of the people of Jerusalem by famine, pestilence, and the sword.

Ezekiel 6-7: Ezekiel predicted the imminent destruction of Judah but promised that a faithful remnant of the people would remember the Lord in Babylon.

Ezekiel 8: Ezekiel was carried over the city of Jerusalem in a vision and permitted to look down on the wickedness of the people.

Ezekiel 9: Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of the Lord departing from the most holy place of the Temple (verse 3). But the Lord put His mark on the foreheads of the faithful that they might be spared in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 10: Ezekiel was again given the vision of the four living creatures by which the Lord seems to have indicated the future state of His faithful and redeemed people in heaven. (See Rev. 4-5.) The glory of the Lord that had already departed from the most holy place now departed from the threshold of the Temple (verse 18).

Ezekiel 11: In light of Ezekiel's vision of Judah's wickedness, he again prophesied its destruction. However, God again promised that He would not forsake the faithful but would finally bring them into new life in Christ (verses 16-21). Ezekiel was then shown a vision of God's glory departing from the city of Jerusalem (verses 22-25).

Ezekiel 12: Ezekiel signified Judah's imminent destruction by removing his stuff as a fugitive, eating his bread with quaking, and drinking his water with trembling.

Ezekiel 13: Ezekiel prophesied against the lying prophets.

Ezekiel 14: Ezekiel refused to answer the captive elders of Judah who came to him insincerely, with idolatry in their hearts, God said that the Jews gone so far into idolatry that He would not spare them even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were within the city. Even these righteous men could only save themselves.

Ezekiel 15: The Lord showed by the vision of the burning vine that the sinful people of Judah deserved His judgment of fire.

Ezekiel 16: Ezekiel pictured the hideousness of Judah's sin by the symbol of a wife who was clothed, beautiful, and blessed of Jehovah, but who had gone away from Him to idols. God said they were more guilty than Sodom and Samaria because they had sinned against light and privilege. (See Matt. 10:15; 11:20-24.) But He promised a spiritual restoration by His everlasting covenant, which was the promised new covenant in Christ (verses 60-63).

Ezekiel 17: Ezekiel showed by the parable of the great eagle that Zedekiah would be punished for rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar and looking to the pharaoh of Egypt for help. (See Ezekiel 31.)

Ezekiel 18: God vindicated His punishment of Judah by showing that He would not punish them for the sins of their fathers but for their own sins, for they had continued to walk in their fathers' footsteps.

Ezekiel 19: Ezekiel lamented to the captives concerning the destruction of their mother (the Jews who were still in Judah), who would also be brought to Babylon soon.

Ezekiel 20: Ezekiel again refused to answer the inquiry of the elders who came to him insincerely, without an attitude of repentance. But he promised that they would finally be regathered after their punishment had brought them to repentance.

Ezekiel 21: By the signs of sighing and a sword, Ezekiel signified the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and said the people would not be able to escape the king of Babylon. He said that Israel would not again have a king to reign until Christ came (verses 26-27). He also pronounced judgment on the Ammonites.

Ezekiel 22: Ezekiel enumerated the sins of the people, the priests, the princes, and the prophets. By the parable of the dross in the furnace, he indicated the severity of their judgment.

Ezekiel 23: Ezekiel described the idolatry of Israel and Judah as spiritual adultery in the parable of Aholah and Aholibah.

Ezekiel 24: By the boiling pot Ezekiel indicated the seething wickedness of the people of Jerusalem. The Lord signified the desolation He was bringing upon them by taking away Ezekiel's wife.

Ezekiel 25-32: Ezekiel prophesied of the judgment to be sent on the various nations. God pronounced judgment on each of the nations for their hatred and persecution of His people Israel. These prophecies, which have already been fulfilled on the nations named, also look ahead to God's final judgment on all worldly rules, which will terminate in the kingdom of Antichrist in the end time.

Ezekiel 33: God again impressed on Ezekiel his responsibility to warn the people of His judgment for their sins. In the twelfth year of Ezekiel's captivity, he received word of the fall of Jerusalem (verses 21-22). He again told the captives that this had befallen Judah because of her sins. God revealed to him the insincerity of those who professed to accept his messages (verses 29-33).

Ezekiel 34: Ezekiel pronounced judgment against the faithless and mercenary shepherds (verses 1-10) and prophesied of the Good Shepherd to come by whom the faithful would be restored (verses 11-31).

Ezekiel 35: Ezekiel pronounced judgment against Mount Seri, which represented the Edomites, because they had rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem and hoped to possess their land.

Ezekiel 36: Now that Jerusalem had fallen, Ezekiel sought to comfort the captives of Judah in their desolations. He promised that their enemies would be punished and that they would be restored to their land after they had repented of their idolatries. He also gave a most definite prophecy of their future spiritual restoration in Christ (verses 25-27).

Ezekiel 37: Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones portrayed symbolically the complete restoration, both natural and spiritual, of the people of Israel. He also showed that when they were restored, they would no longer be two nations but one. (See Ephesians 2:11-22.)

Ezekiel 38-39: Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog and Magog (Gog is the prince and Magog is his land) refers to the Beast and his armies, who will march against Israel. At the height of his glory, he will be destroyed by the Lord in the Battle of Armageddon. Many Bible students identify this North Country as Russia, and Meshech and Tubal as Moscow and Tobolsk. Note 38:14-19. Compare Ezekiel 39 with Rev. 19:11-21. Note also 39:29.

Ezekiel 40-48: Fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was given a vision of the restoration of the Temple, which he described in these chapters. He described the

Lord with a measuring reed showing His own required dimensions of His house (Ezekiel 40-42).

This was doubtless a reference to the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel when the Jews returned to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus. But the house of the Lord that Ezekiel described went far beyond the Temple of Zerubbabel. At the laying of the foundation of Zerubbabel's Temple, the old men of Israel who had seen Solomon's Temple before its destruction wept because they knew this house could never equal the beautiful Temple of Solomon (Ezra 3:12-13; Haggai 2:1-9).

And yet God promised a temple that would far exceed the glory of Solomon's Temple by reason of His glory that would fill it (43:1-6). Ezekiel prophesied of this house, which was not to be built with hands. (See II Cor. 5:1; 6:19-20; Eph. 2:19-22.) This spiritual house, which was shown to be foursquare (40:47; 42:13-14; 42:20), evidently refers to the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21. This was to be the throne of the Lord from which He would rule His people forever (43:7). God impressed upon Israel that only the pure and holy would inhabit His spiritual house (Ezekiel 44).

Ezekiel 45-46 appears to be mostly instructions for the natural people after their return to Jerusalem. Ezekiel 47-48 evidently relates to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel in the Millennium (Rev. 21-22).

Study Questions for Ezekiel

1. Where, to whom, and when did Ezekiel prophecy?
2. Under what conditions did he prophecy?
3. What vision was given to Ezekiel at the time he was called to the prophetic ministry? What other Bible character was given this same vision, and what is its interpretation?
4. What was Ezekiel's commission, and how was his responsibility impressed upon him?
5. Name the various symbolic signs by which he warned the people, and tell what each one signified.
6. Describe Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem that is recorded in Ezekiel 8-11. Where was he at the time he was given this vision?
7. What did he teach by the parable of the dross in the furnace (Ezekiel 22)?
8. In Ezekiel 22, with what sins did he charge the people, the priests, the princes, and the prophets?
9. What chapter records Ezekiel's prophecies against the nations?
10. For what general offense was God's judgment pronounced against the various nations?
11. In Ezekiel 34, for what sin did God condemn the unfaithful shepherds?
12. What changed trend did Ezekiel's prophecies take after the destruction of Jerusalem?

13. What prophecy of the future spiritual kingdom was given in Ezekiel 36:26-27?
14. For what sin did Ezekiel condemn the Edomites in Ezekiel 35-36?
15. Give the interpretation of the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37.
16. What do Gog and Magog apparently refer to in Ezekiel 38?
17. The detailed description of Ezekiel 40-48 is a prediction of what?

MINOR PROPHETS

Introduction

The twelve prophetic books of this study are called "Minor Prophets," not because they are less important, but because they are shorter than the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. With the exception of the last three books, the Minor Prophets are not arranged in chronological order. Nevertheless, we shall study them as they appear in the Bible.

A chronological chart of Old Testament kings and prophets, arranged by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Th. D., professor of Old Testament in Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, gives the historical period of each of the prophets. The historical background of each prophet, which had a definite influence on his prophecy, is recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

Chapter One

Hosea, The Prophet of Love

Introduction

Hosea prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah; and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Contemporary with Isaiah (Isa. 1:1), Amos (Amos 1:1), and Micah (Micah 1:1), Hosea was a prophet of the northern kingdom known as Israel, and his messages were principally to the ten tribes with only an occasional reference to Judah. The historical background for his prophecy is found in II Kings 14 through 16 and II Chronicles 26 through 32.

His messages were directed against the steady decline of Israel into idolatry, for which the kingdom fell into Assyrian captivity near the end of his prophecy. He pictured Israel's sin of idolatry as spiritual adultery by the object lesson of his own wife, who was a sinful woman and an unfaithful wife.

Hosea 1: Israel, the Unfaithful Wife

God told Hosea to marry a sinful woman of whoredoms as a demonstration to Israel of the terrible wickedness of the sin of idolatry (verse 2). This was intended to shock the people of Israel into a realization of the enormity of their unfaithfulness to Jehovah. They had vowed to worship and to serve only Jehovah, keeping all His commandments, for which He promised them great blessings and benefits (Deu. 28:1-14). They had broken those vows and God's curses were now coming upon them (Deu. 28:47-48; 30:15-20).

God also used the children of Hosea's unfaithful wife to typify the chastisements He would send on those who had broken their vows to Him. He told Hosea the first son should be called Jezreel. The Jezreelites were descendants of Ahab and Jezebel (verse 4). God ordered Jehu to be anointed king of Israel that he might kill all the house (descendants) of Ahab to avenge the blood of His servants and prophets at the hand of Jezebel (II Kings 9:1-37; 10:1-11). Ahab was said to have done more to provoke the anger of the Lord than all the kings of Israel before him (I Kings 16:29-33).

The Lord broke the bow (strength) of Israel when, in the ninth year of their King Hoshea, the Assyrians took Samaria and carried the people of Israel into Assyrian territory (II Kings 17:6, 7).

Gomer's second child was a daughter, whom God said should be named Lo-ruhamah (Unpitied) to indicate that He would no longer have mercy on the people of Israel. His mercy to Judah was extended 136 years after the fall of Israel (verses 6 and 7). Israel was taken captive by Assyria in 721 B.C., and Judah was carried into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

Gomer's third child, a son, was named Lo-amni (Not My People) to indicate that Israel, as a nation, would no longer be God's people. However, God promised their future regathering as one nation with the people of Judah.

Hosea 2: Israel's Chastisement and Restoration

The ten tribes of Israel were led into idolatry by Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, when the kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon. Jeroboam became king of the ten tribes, called Israel, and Solomon's son Rehoboam became king of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, usually called Judah. Because Jeroboam feared that the people would return to the rule of Rehoboam during a time of worship in Jerusalem, he introduced the idolatry of Egypt, patterning it after the worship of Jehovah. This involved two golden calves and setting one shrine in Bethel, near the boundary of Judah, just ten miles from Jerusalem, and another in Dan in the northern part of the kingdom. He gave the excuse that it was too far for the people to return to Jerusalem to worship (I Kings 12:26-

33). This is the reason that he has been referred to as “Jeroboam who made Israel to sin” (I Kings 14:15, 16; 15:30, 34; 16:19; II Kings 10:29-31; 14:23, 24; 16:8, 9, 17, 18, 23, 24, 27, 28; 17:6, 7, 21-23).

Hosea’s wife, Gomer, was a type of the idolatrous nation of Israel. God used this object lesson to plead with the people of Israel, through His prophet Hosea, to turn from their wicked ways (verses 1-3). They continued, however, to follow after their idols and attributed the blessing of Jehovah to their false gods (verses 4-13). God finally gave them up to Assyrian captivity, but He gave promise of their restoration (verses 14-23) because He knew that in captivity many of them would repent and turn back to Him.

Verse 15 refers to the Valley of Anchor. This is the location where Achan and all that pertained to him were stoned after the taking of Ai. Just as the death of Achan cleansed Israel from the guilt of sin, the Assyrian captivity was Israel’s “door of hope” to complete reunion with God.

Hosea 3: The Future Davidic Kingdom

Hosea’s unfaithful wife went after other lovers, but God told him to love her and to buy her to him again. God intended this to be an illustration to unfaithful Israel. Because He still loved her in spite of her idolatry with all its attendant sins, He would buy her back again after her captivity. Both Israel and Judah were finally restored to their homeland, but God brought them back through Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who became their eternal King (I Cor. 6:14-20; 7:23).

Hosea 4: The General Charges of Israel’s Sins

Hosea enumerated the many sins of Israel: falsehood, unmercifulness, swearing, lying, murder, stealing, committing adultery – just to name a few. These were all symbolized by the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s wife. Only captivity in the land of wicked and cruel Assyria could bring them to a realization of their great wrong. They had rejected knowledge of God to follow idols because they wanted to indulge in the sins of the heathens. Likewise, many people today are willingly ignorant of God’s way because they do not want to live the Christian life of holiness (Rom. 10:1-3; II Peter 3:1-7).

Judah was warned against following in the footsteps of backsliding Israel. However, the people of Judah also forsook the Lord, following after the gods and the ways of the heathens (Jeremiah 3:6-10).

Hosea 5: Jehovah’s Rebuke to the Priests and Kings

Hosea called for the attention of the priests, the people of Israel, and the house (household) of the king to give them

a general survey of God’s judgments against sin. Although he rebuked them many times, they continued to be a snare and a downward way of idolatry. Israel’s kings and priests, in revolting against God, had become extremely intense in their desire to erase the people’s faith in God. As they refused to heed the prophet’s rebukes, he could only tell them they must fall in their iniquity (verses 1-5).

Jeroboam’s deceptive religion caused them to think they pleased God in their sacrifices from their flocks and herds, but God could not accept the sacrifices that came through idols. Therefore, Ephraim would become desolate, and without excuse, in the day of God’s rebuke (verses 6-9).

The princes of Judah also had offended. They were said to be like them who remove the bound, or boundary (Deu. 19:14; 27:17), for which God said He would pour His wrath on them like water. He had pronounced a curse on any who tried to steal land from his neighbor by removing his landmark. God punished both Ephraim and Judah by permitting their enemies to oppress them.

Ephraim sought help from Assyria (II Kings 15:17-20), but Assyria did not heal his sickness nor Judah’s wound (Jer. 30:12, 13). Jeremiah said, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Neither Israel nor Judah could make themselves righteous, but God ordained salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world for all men (Eph. 1:4-14). Jeremiah prophesied of this salvation in his pleading with Judah (Jer. 30:8-10; 31:31-34).

God told both Ephraim and Judah that He would give them into captivity and they would not return till they acknowledged their offences and sought His face (verse 15).

Hosea 6: The Remnant and the Latter Rain Restoration

In verse 1, Hosea gave both Israel and Judah God’s call to repentance. Verse 2 is evidently prophetic of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection by which we are raised up to eternal life (Rom. 6:4; 8:1; I Cor. 6:14; II Cor. 4:14). Verse 3 is prophetic of the coming of the Holy Ghost as the early and latter rain unto the earth, which was poured out as the result of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (I Cor. 15:1-4). The people of Israel were so fickle in nature (verse 4) that nothing short of regeneration in Christ could turn them from their backsliding. God continued to hew and to slay them by His words from the mouth of His prophets. God desired mercy rather than sacrifice and a knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But because the people continued to transgress His covenant and to defile themselves, He said they would have to be given into captivity (verses 5-11).

Hosea 7: The Rebuke of Jehovah

The tribe of Ephraim descended from Joseph's second son and was one of the strongest tribes of Israel, rivaling the tribe of Judah (Psalm 78:67, 68). It appears to have become the strongest of the ten tribes in the northern kingdom. Its territory near the center of the northern nation was the most fertile and beautiful area of Israel. It was afterward called Samaria and the city of Samaria became the capital of the kingdom of Israel. Consequently, it appears that Ephraim, as used in these chapters, referred to the king or the ruling class.

The kings and princes led the people in all the wicked sins of idolatry, but they never considered that God would send punishment on them for their sins. They lived from day to day for the pleasures of sin. As a baker, they prepared for their indulgences of the following day. The fervency of their wickedness was compared to a baker's hot oven (verses 2-7).

Ephraim had mixed himself among the heathen nations around him. He indulged in all the sins of idolatry, not realizing that strangers (heathens) had "devoured his strength." Israel had gone so far from God that the people did not think of calling on Him for help (verses 6-10).

Although they called to Egypt for help, Ephraim went to Assyria as captives (II Kings 17:1-16).

Hosea 8: Punishment for Apostasy

Judah had also transgressed God's laws. Finally, as if God blew a trumpet, He caused Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to take Judah captive and to destroy the house of God, Solomon's temple (verse 1).

Hosea prophesied of Israel that their enemies would pursue them because they had cast off that which was good. They had set up kings that were not of the house of David and had made priests of the lowest of the people. They had made idols of silver and gold, but their golden calves could not save them (verses 2-6).

Israel must now reap what they had sown. They hired lovers from among the heathens by seeking their help, for which they "gave presents" (paid tribute). Israel would now be scattered among the Gentiles because they had counted the great things of God's law as something strange, of which they had no knowledge. Their sacrifices were not made to God; they had forgotten their Maker. They returned to an Egyptian-like bondage in Assyrian captivity (Hosea 11:5), while Judah also was continuing to slip further into idolatry (verses 7-14).

Hosea 9: A Rebuke of Israel's False Rejoicing

Israel had a brief reprieve from their oppressors during the reign of Jeroboam II. By the mercy of God, the king was able to deliver them from the bitter affliction of their enemies (II Kings 14:23-27). Hosea probably referred to that even in verse 1. Because they did not repent of their wickedness, greater tribulation lay ahead of them. Hosea continued to pronounce their coming destruction as a nation.

He spoke of their going to Egypt, but the only scriptural record of their going to Egypt was of Hoshea, their last king, sending messengers to Egypt to seek help against Assyria (II Kings 17:4-7). They entered into bondage in Assyrian captivity, as their forefathers had known in Egypt. Hosea closed his message of chapter 9 with these words, "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (verses 2-17).

Hosea 10: Chastisement

Israel became prosperous during some periods of their history, especially during the reign of Jeroboam II. But spiritually, however, they became an empty vine. The religion that Jeroboam I introduced in the beginning of his reign was very deceptive because its idolatry was so much like the worship of Jehovah. Yet, its gods were dead, inanimate images that could do nothing for the people (Psalm 115:1-9).

It is no wonder that Israel had become an empty vine, after having known the true worship and power of Jehovah, the only true and living God (Psalm 114:1-8). Their idol worship only brought them shame, misery, and captivity. Their golden calves were finally given to the king of Assyria as tribute to appease him (verses 1-6).

Hosea told Israel that God's severe chastisements would cause them to call for the mountains and hills to fall on them and cover them. They were coming to a time when they would no longer be able to tread out the corn in their prosperity. In view of all this, the prophet again pleased with them to repent. He said, "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" (verse 12). The Lord rained righteousness in the Holy Ghost on all who sought Him on the day of Pentecost (Rom. 5:17). He is still raining righteousness in the Holy Ghost on all who repent and seek His face (verses 7-15).

Hosea 11: Jehovah's Mercy and Controversy with Israel

God is a God of justice and judgment, but He is also a God of great mercy. His mercy on Israel is pictured in this

chapter. A very heart warming picture is portrayed in verses 1-4.

The Lord never lost sight of the descendants of Abraham, to whom he promised the land of Canaan for a national home. In verse 1 we see Him loving them and calling them out from under Egyptian bondage by the hand of Moses. And in verse 3 we see Him, as a loving Father, taking the arms of Ephraim to teach him and to help him to walk. It should be a great comfort and blessing to every child of God to think of his heavenly Father showing him the way to go and helping him to walk in the Lord's paths.

God had loved the people of Israel, had delivered them from all their enemies, and had supplied their food and needs, but they had forgotten His blessings and His healing of their wounds. Many times in the past, they had wanted to return to Egypt. Perhaps this was now the case. However, the Lord would not permit this and they were to be taken captive by the wicked and cruel Assyrians. As they were bent on backsliding from God, the sword would continue to devour their offspring. When the prophets called them to return to Jehovah, they refused to exalt Him (verses 5-7), even at the call of Elijah (I Kings 18:21-39). After the fire consumed Elijah's sacrifice, they acknowledged the Lord as God, but they did not continue to serve Him.

God was again moved with compassion for Israel. He did not want to give up Ephraim, or to make the people like Admah and Zeboim (cities that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah – Gen. 10:19; 19:24, 25). But when they refused to repent, He could only mete to them justice. However, He would not execute the fierceness of His wrath against them, but would extend mercy in His chastisements (verses 8-10).

Hosea 12: Jacob, an Example to Israel

Verse 1 refers to Hoshea's breaking his covenant with the king of Assyria by sending messengers to Egypt to seek help against Assyria (II Kings 17:3-6).

Hosea reminded Israel of God's past blessings and chastisements from the time of their beginning in Jacob. He recalled Jacob's wrestling with the angel of God, by which he obtained power with God and men (Gen. 32:24-30) and how he had found God at Bethel (Gen. 28:11-22). The prophet again called them to turn back to God. He was forced to conclude that Israel was a merchant with false balances, who loved to oppress, and Ephraim was absorbed with riches and prosperity (verses 2-8).

God had dealt with Israel as a nation from the time they left Egypt. He had given them some great leaders, especially Moses and Joshua, and had sent them many prophets (II Chron. 36:15, 16) to whom He had given many

visions, types, and shadows, by which to show them the way of eternal life. In spite of their repeated backslidings, He continued to deal with them, even after they had gone into captivity (verses 9-14). Our great omniscient God knew that many of them would repent and turn to Him in true faith and that he would "yet make them dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of their solemn feasts." Proof of the salvation of many is shown in the record of Hebrews 11:32-40. In Heb. 12:1, 2, the apostle admonished us to be as faithful as some of these Israelites.

Hosea 13: Ephraim's Death Notice

Ephraim had gone a long way down the road of idolatry since the division of the kingdom of Israel. From the time the people of the northern kingdom were led away from the worship of Jehovah by their first king Jeroboam I, they had continued to go deeper into idolatry. After worshiping the golden calf, they began to worship the many gods of the heathen nations around them. Finally they were led into the worship of Baal by Ahab and his heathen wife Jezebel (I Kings 16:29-33; 18:17-41). The worship of Baal was probably the most sinful of all, for in Baal Ephraim had died (verses 1-3).

God had been Israel's Lord and Savior from the time of their sojourn in Egypt. Without Him they would have been lost as there is no Savior beside Him. According to human nature, when the people of Israel became affluent by God's blessings (Deu. 6:10-15), they forgot the Lord, the source of all their blessings. Therefore, though He still loved them, God was forced to fight against them, even as a bear or a lion (verses 4-8).

The people of Israel had destroyed themselves. Yet, there was still hope and help for them in the Lord God. He would ransom them from sin and death, but first they must be made desolate. Only then would they truly turn back to God (verses 9-16).

Hosea 14: Israel Reconciled to Jehovah

Hosea closed his prophecy with another call to repentance and a promise of God's forgiveness. He even gave them the very words of repentance to use. In the land of captivity, many of them did repent, and doubtless used some of the words that Hosea had suggested. Some of their words are recorded in Psalm 126:1-4:

"When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south."

Our great merciful God will always receive, with joy, all who turn to Him whole-heartedly. Jesus said:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Ephraim turned from idols, never to return to them again (verses 5-9).

Chapter Two

Joel, The Prophet of Pentecost

Introduction

There is little scriptural indication of the time of Joel's prophecy. He is thought by some to have prophesied during the reign of Joash over Judah, and to have been contemporary with Elisha. There was a famine during the ministry of Elisha, but no mention was made of insects (II Kings 8:1-3). If Joel prophesied during the reign of Joash, the historical background of his prophecy would be II Kings 11 and 12; and II Chron. 23 and 24. No personal information is given of him except that he was the son of Pethuel of whom we know nothing.

The occasion of his prophecy was an unusually severe invasion of insects, which devastated the land.

Joel 1: Message of Calamity

Joel began his ministry with prophecy that a great calamity would soon come on the people of Judah. He said that even the old men had never seen any thing like it in their days, nor had they heard of any thing like it in the days of their fathers. It would be something that would be told to their children and grandchildren in generations to come (verses 1-3).

He then told them this calamity would be a very severe invasion of insects, which would come as a mighty army and strip their land of all vegetation. These insects are believed to have been different stages of the locusts or grasshoppers rather than different species of insects. Hordes of grasshoppers are certainly capable of leaving the land bare and desolate. This invasion was being sent to chastise the people of Judah for their sins and to call them to sincere repentance in fasting and prayer (verses 4-14).

This invasion of insects (verses 15-20) was called “the day of the Lord,” a scriptural phrase for a time of God's

judgment. They seem to have neglected the services of the Lord, such as the meat offerings and drink offerings, as well as the sins of idolatry. Now there would be nothing for meat and drink offerings. Their seed would rot under the clods, the garner would be empty and the barns broken down, for the corn would wither. The cattle and sheep would groan because there would be no pasture. Then the people would cry to the Lord for deliverance from the pestilence (Isa. 26:9).

Joel 2: Message of Future Tribulation and Blessing

The plague of insects, which was to punish the people of Judah for their present sins, would not be the end of their trouble. This plague was used to symbolize a greater invasion coming in a more distant future. It would devastate the land much as the insects had (verses 1-20). It was now time to blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm for the greater trouble yet to come. It would be a day of clouds and thick darkness, for a strong people, a great army, was coming against Judah. (The use of the devastation of the insects to symbolize the devastation of another army is an example of the *Law of Double Reference*.)

Joel's prophecy does not indicate when or from what nation this strong army would come against Judah. Nevertheless, a study of Judah's history during the reign of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:13-17; 19:1-37) reveals the invading army of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, to have been their strongest opponent. This perhaps brought them to their darkest hour before the Babylonian captivity, for the Assyrians were known to be a very cruel and overbearing people. It had only been a few years since the Assyrian king Shalmaneser had captured Samaria and carried the people of Israel into Assyria (II Kings 17:1-7). Assyria seemed bent on bringing all the nations under their control. Sennacherib had taken all the fenced cities of Judah. Hezekiah had tried to buy him off with silver and gold (II Kings 18:13-16), but he was determined to take Jerusalem.

He sent his captains with a great host against Jerusalem. Rab-shakeh tried to terrify the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He hurled threats, ridiculed the strength of Hezekiah, and blasphemed the name of Jehovah. He tried to frighten the people into surrendering (II Kings 18:17-37). The Eliakim, governor of the king's household, Joah, and Sheba the scribe went to Hezekiah and related all the demoralizing words of Rab-shakeh. Hezekiah sent them, with the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah with a very urgent request for prayer. He then humbled himself in sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord (II Kings 19:1-5).

Isaiah returned the Lord's answer by the servants of Hezekiah:

“... Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words, which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land” (II Kings 19:6, 7).

Hezekiah then received a threatening letter from Sennacherib. He took it into the house of the Lord, where he spread it before the Lord and prayed (II Kings 19:8-9). As a result, Isaiah sent this message for Hezekiah to return to Sennacherib:

“...The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the Holy One of Israel” (II Kings 19:21, 22).

The Lord fought Hezekiah’s battle against Sennacherib. He returned to his own land and his sons killed him there (II Kings 19:23-37).

This even could very well have been the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:1-20. King Ahaz, who reigned over Judah prior to Hezekiah’s reign, had walked in the idolatrous ways of the kings of Israel and led the people of Judah into idolatry. When good King Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, it was surely time for a revival. When Hezekiah and the elders of the priests humbled themselves in sackcloth, prayed, and called on Isaiah to intercede, the Lord heard and delivered them from the Assyrians. In Joel’s prophecy, the Lord heard the repentance of His people and saved them from their enemies (Joel 2:21-27).

Joel gave a third prophecy of something very wonderful to come in the more distant future (verses 28, 29). We know the time of fulfillment and the meaning of this prophecy. The Apostle Peter, in his first gospel message on the day of Pentecost, interpreted it as the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the 120 disciples who gathered in the upper room (Acts 2:1-18, 37-39; Joel 2:32).

Joel 3: Message of Judgment on Israel’s Enemies

Joel 2:30, 31 really belong to the prophecy of chapter 3, in which Joel prophesied of the end-time battle of Armageddon. Joel spoke of a time when God would bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. Even though today there is a nation of Israel in their homeland, the people of Israel, as a whole, have never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ since they rejected and crucified Him nearly two thousand years ago. They have never completely

returned to their homeland since the Babylonian captivity, but are still scattered among the nations, and looking toward Jerusalem, hoping to rebuild their temple. When the Lord gathers all nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat for the battle of Armageddon, they will be made to acknowledge and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

There is no valley in Palestine called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. But evidently this is the place where God heard the prayer of Jehoshaphat when He destroyed the three nations of Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir (Edom), who marched against Judah (II Chron. 20:1-25). This symbolized the place where He would destroy the nations that made up the kingdom of antichrist for their wickedness against the Lord and His people (verses 1-8). At this time, when the people of Israel witness God’s miraculous power over their enemies (II Thess. 2:3-8; Rev. 19:11-16), they will acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:9-11), and will say, “...Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:9).

When Jesus instructed the disciples just before His ascension to return to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father (Holy Ghost), they asked Him if He would restore the kingdom to Israel at that time (Acts 1:4-8). He answered that it was not for them to know that which God would perform in His own time and power.

God’s people today are a spiritual kingdom, comprised of individuals from all nations and races of people who have come to Jesus and been baptized by His Spirit into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12, 13), which is His Church (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). However, both Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament have borne witness to a time in the future when Israel, as a nation, will accept God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:25-27). When they accept Jesus, they will be sealed with the Holy Ghost, just as the Church of today has been sealed (II Cor. 1:21, 22; Eph. 1:12-14).

Verses 17-21 refer to the time after the battle of Armageddon when the people of Israel shall have accepted Jesus as their God and Savior. This period is called the millennial reign of Christ. The devil will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-6) and the curse will be lifted off the earth (Gen. 3:14-19). Then the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habak. 2:14). The Prophet Isaiah has also given us a picture of the millennium of Christ (Isa. 11:1-9). When the Lord lifts the curse from off the earth, the ferocity will be taken from the wild animals and nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God’s holy mountain.

Chapter Three

Amos, The Prophet of Justice

Introduction

Like Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, Amos prophesied during the reign of Uzziah over Judah and that of Jeroboam II over Israel (verse 1). The historical background of his prophecy is found in II Kings 14:23-29; 15:1-7; II Chron. 26:1-23. He was a native herdsman of Tekoa, in Judah, which was about six miles south of Bethlehem. This whole area seems to have been given to the herding of sheep and cattle. But like David, Amos did not escape the scrutinizing eyes of the Lord, who saw in him a man of faith and courage and one who would be obedient to His call.

Amos was called to prophesy to Israel (the ten tribes), but he also had a message for Judah. The time of his call was dated two years before the earthquake, which took place during the reign of Uzziah (Zech. 14:5). The principal place of his ministry was Bethel, the city which housed the altar of the golden calf.

Amos: 1 Judgment of the Surrounding Nations

God gave Amos a vision of Israel's condition at this time, and without hesitation he began to minister to them the words of the Lord as he had seen in the vision. He said the Lord was going to roar from Zion, uttering His judgments, which were coming on the people of Israel (verse 2). God was often said to roar His message to the people (Hosea 11:10; Joel 3:16). This was to convey to them the mighty authority of His word and the terribleness of His judgment against sin.

Amos' first message from the Lord was to the surrounding nations that were enemies to Israel and Judah. He told Damascus (capital of Syria) that for three transgressions, and for four, He would not turn away their punishment. This phrase, with which He began each message, signified that he would not act in judgment for the first offence, but only after repeated offences. He would punish Damascus for threshing Gilead (tribe of Reuben) with instruments of iron (verses 3-6). Syria would finally be cut off and go into captivity for plundering the tribes of Israel east of the Jordan River (II Kings 8:7-15; 10:32, 33; Jer. 12:14; 13:4-7).

God's punishment against Gaza of the Philistines, with whom Israel had much warfare, would be a fire, which would destroy the palaces of Gaza. He would also cut off the inhabitants and rulers from Ashdod and Ashkelon, Philistine cities (verses 6-8).

God promised a fire on the walls of Tyrus, which would devour their palaces, because they delivered God's people to Edom (verses 9, 10). This seems to have been

a prophecy of what Tyrus would do to the people of Judah at the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and God's punishment was the destruction of Tyrus by the Babylonian king (Eze. 26:1-8). Earlier Tyrus had a close covenant of friendship with David and Solomon.

Amos, as well as Obadiah (Obadiah 10-15 and Ezekiel (Eze. 25:12-13; 35:1-15), prophesied of Edom's violence against the people of Judah at the time Nebuchadnezzar. This king would destroy Jerusalem and carry the Jews to Babylon. However, God would judge them for their cruelty against His people (verses 11, 12).

God also told Amos that He would destroy the Ammonites for their warfare and cruelties against the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, whose territory east of the Jordan River was near Ammon (verses 13-15). They had continued to plague the Israelites for many years (I Sam. 11:1-11). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied of God's judgments on them (Jer. 49:1,2; Eze. 21:28-32; 25:1-7).

Amos 2: Judgment of Israel, Judah, and Their Neighbors

Both the Ammonites and the Moabites were descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:33-38). The Moabite, whose territory was east of the Dead Sea and near Ammon, gave the Israelites much trouble over the years (verses 1-3). God also sent His judgment on them (II Chron. 20:1-29).

God punished all the nations that mistreated His people, but He also punished the people of Judah and Israel for their sins. He was longsuffering with them, as with the heathen nations, but after repeated offences, His judgments fell hard and swift. His charge against the people of Judah was that they despised His law and had not kept His commandments (verses 4, 5). Since Solomon had turned from the Lord to idols, there had been more of their kings who worshiped idols than those who followed the Lord (I Kings 11:1-13). The people had been led by idolatrous kings and the lies of false prophets into idolatry. God's punishment for their many years of sinning was the Babylonian captivity, at which time the temple of Solomon was destroyed and the city of Jerusalem left in ruins.

God's charges against Israel (the ten tribes) were so many that they became the subject of most of the prophecy of Amos. They had gone into idolatry soon after the division of the kingdom, when Jeroboam I had established worship of the golden calf in Bethel and in Dan. They continued to go deeper into idolatry in spite of the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, as well as other prophets God sent them. They made merchandise of the poor, gave wine to the Nasserites, causing them to break their vows to the Lord, and commanded the prophets to cease prophesying (Amos 7:10-13). At the time of their final punishment, the

Assyrian captivity, they would not be able to deliver themselves, even though they had great warriors who were skilled in warfare (verses 6-16).

Amos 3: First Discourse Against Israel

In this passage Amos charged the whole house of Jacob (all Israel) with sinning from the time God led them by Moses out of Egypt. Doubtless their greatest sin had been the sin against privilege and blessing. Because of the faith and faithfulness of Abraham, God had chosen his descendants for His own nation. He had been their Guide, their Protector, and their Supplier of every need over the centuries, but they had rejected and forgotten Him to follow after the gods of the heathens around them. They could not walk with God while worshipping idols. Although they were chastised many times for their many iniquities, His judgment would become still heavier until they, as a nation, were destroyed (verses 1-6).

However, God never sent judgment on His people without first warning them through His prophets of the results of their sins (verses 7, 8). He warned them many times, giving them ample time and opportunities to repent (II Chron. 36:15-21). He used the heathen nations that did not have the light of the knowledge of God and the privileges Israel had enjoyed punishing them for their unfaithfulness and unthankfulness. They would finally be destroyed by wild animals (verses 9-12), and all that they treasured would be demolished (verses 13-15).

Amos 4: Second Discourse Against Israel

Perhaps Amos referred to the people of Israel as kind (cattle) because they oppressed the poor, with no more humans feeling than cattle while themselves lived in luxury. He told them the Lord would take them away from their luxurious and pleasant places, and they would go out like cows going through a fence wherever there was a breach (verses 1-3).

Amos reproved them for their insincere pretense of worship of Jehovah by idolatrous practices before the altar at Bethel. They offered sacrifices of thanksgiving with the leaven (false doctrine) of idolatry (Matt. 16:6, 11, 12). They hypocritically brought their tithes after three years and publicly proclaimed their free-will offerings (Matt. 6:1-4). This was the kind of people their false religion had made of the children of Israel (verses 4, 5).

In verse 6, the prophet did not refer to the proper brushing of their teeth, but to the fact that God had withheld meat and bread from them by famine. He had caused it to rain on some cities and places and withheld rain from other cities and locations. When the people left the dry cities to go where there was water, however, they were not satisfied. The places, which had no rain, were dried up

(blasted) and those, which had rain, had too much and were spoiled with mildew. When their gardens, vineyards, and fruit trees increased, the palmerworms devoured them. God chastised them with pestilence and warfare. He took away their horses and spoiled their camps. He overthrew some of them as He had Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet they refused to return to the Lord (verses 7-11).

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name” (Amos 4:12, 13).

Amos 5: Third Discourse Against Israel

It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should repent (II Peter 3:9). Here Amos expressed His deep sorrow that Israel had not repented, in spite of His pleading with them through the prophets and His many chastisements (verses 1-3). It appears that by the time they would go into captivity, they would be reduced to about ten percent of their former strength.

God still pleaded with Israel to seek Him and live. He warned them not to seek for help at Bethel, the place of the golden calf, or Gilgal, which housed the carved image. If they failed to seek the Lord, He would send a fire to devour the house of Joseph (the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which seemed to be Israel's chief tribes). Their only hope was in the Lord, the Creator of all things, who is omnipotent (having all power), omniscient (knowing all), and omnipresent (everywhere present).

The people of Israel hated the prophets who rebuked them in the gates for their evil ways and admonished them to live uprightly. They enriched themselves by taking away from the poor, and would not permit justice to be executed in the gates, which were public meeting places where they held their court trials. God was not going to permit them to live in their stone houses or to drink the wine from their pleasant vineyards. There was yet time for them to reform, to turn from evil to good, but if they did not, they must pay the consequences (verses 4-15).

Amos told them the consequences of their evil ways and refusal to repent would be the day of God's judgment on them, a very dark day indeed, when they would wail in the streets and in the highways, as those who were skillful in wailing for funerals (Jer. 9:17, 18). The people seemed to think that their sacrifices, which were similar to those they had offered to Jehovah in former years, would bring them deliverance. But these sacrifices were offered to idols, which had no power to help. They must go into Assyrian captivity. There could be no escape (verses 16-27).

Amos 6: Announcement of Judgment

Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II over Israel, which seems to have been the most prosperous time of their history. Jeroboam II had walked in the way of Jeroboam I, who had started Israel in the way of idolatry. But God had mercy on the people, who at that time were being sorely afflicted by the tribes around them. He used Jeroboam to defeat their enemies and restore the land they had lost from the entering of Hamath in the northeast part of Israel's territory (II Kings 14:23-28). Jonah prophesied of this in the only record we have of his prophesying, except ton Nineveh (II Kings 14:25).

Afterward, the people of Israel felt very secure and lapsed into a state of complacency and ease. They indulged in all the luxuries and pleasures of their prosperity. They put any thought of trouble in the far distant future, but, by their complacency, helped to bring the time of disaster near by failing to prepare for it (verses 1-6).

Amos continued to give them God's warning of coming disaster. They credited themselves for the victories Jeroboam had won. They said, "...Have we not taken to us horns [power] by our own strength?" But God said Israel would first go into captivity, ahead of Judah. They had been restored from Hamath to the sea of the plain (Mediterranean), but God said they would soon be afflicted from Hemath (Hamath) to the river of the wilderness, the river of Egypt on the south (verses 7-14).

Amos 7: Amos' First Three Visions

God gave Amos a vision that made him an intercessor for the people of Israel. He saw a plague of grasshoppers that would leave the land desolate. He prayed earnestly that God would forgive them, and God mercifully withdrew the plague. In another vision, Amos saw the land being burned with fire, and again prayed and God withdrew His judgment of fire. He told the people what God had shown him and of God's mercy in withholding His chastisements. Amos again had a vision of the Lord with a plumbline in His hand. This was a sign that inspite of God's great mercy, justice must finally be executed. God gives people every possible opportunity to repent but when they continue in sin till there is no remedy (Isa. 28:17), His judgment must fall (verses 1-9).

The principal place of Amos' ministry seems to have been Bethel, the seat of Israel's idol worship. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam that Amos had prophesied against him and against Israel till the land was unable to bear all his words.

The false priest then tried to drive Amos back to Judah from Bethel. He insinuated that Amos only prophesied for

his bread (living). But Amaziah found he was not dealing with a weakling, but with a man of great courage and of faith that God was able to take care of any situation. Amos boldly told Amaziah that God had called him from following a flock of sheep to prophesy to Israel, and that he meant to obey his God. God then gave him a strong prophecy against Amaziah and his family for his opposition to Amos (verses 10-17).

Amos 8: Amos' Fourth Vision

By a vision of a basket of summer fruit, God showed Amos that Israel was ripe for judgment and He could no longer show mercy to them (verses 1-3). He then gave them God's message of reproof for their dishonest dealing, in which they took from the poor and needy to make themselves rich.

Amos said destruction from the Lord would come on them suddenly. Their lives had seemed bright with the sunshine of prosperity, but God would cause their sun to go down and darkness would cover the land. Their feasts would be turned into mourning and their songs into lamentation. For many years they had despised Gods' law and commandments and the warnings by the prophets, but the time was soon coming when they would long for the word of God by which they might find deliverance (verses 4-14). It would then be too late (Eze. 7:26; Micah 3:6, 7).

Amos 9: Amos' Fifth Vision

Amos last vision was of God standing on the altar (of Bethel), telling him to smite the lintel of the door that the post might shake. Amos had already told Israel not to seek help at the altar of Bethel or Gilgal, for Gilgal would go into captivity and the altar of Bethel would come to nought (Amos 5:5). Then God said to cut all of them in the head. He said He would slay the last of them with the sword. He evidently referred to the priests and prophets of Bethel and the images of Gilgal.

God's final message by Amos was that the nation of Israel would soon go into captivity to Assyria and that many of them would be slain. He made it very plain to Amos, who relayed it to Israel that there would be, no escape from His wrath, except for those who, in faith, found refuge in the name of the Lord. Israel could not run away from God's judgment nor hide from His wrath, for He, who is omnipotent and omniscient, is also omnipresent.

Verses 2 and 3 seem to have been drawn from the inspired Psalm of David (Psalm 139:7-12). It is wonderful to live in the presence of God for those who have fellowship with Him, but His presence means condemnation to the wicked.

Israel's just payment for their sins would be like the floods of Egypt when the Nile overflowed its banks. God would

not destroy those who trusted in Him, but the sinners would die. Death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). God has always had a remnant from among the people of Israel, and He had a remnant when they were in captivity and scattered among the nations (verses 1-10).

Amos' final prophecy of the fall of the kingdom of Israel was fulfilled within thirty years (II Kings 17:6, 7). However, his last prophecy looked ahead to the coming of Christ with full salvation for those of faith from all nations – the New Testament Church. The Lord Jesus Christ built His temple (Eph. 2:19-22), and all may now find salvation in Him (verses 11, 12). Verses 13-15 seem to point to the millennial reign of Christ, when life on earth is restored as it was before the fall.

Chapter Four

Obadiah, The Prophet of Edom

Introduction

There is no scriptural proof of when Obadiah prophesied. However since his prophecy is very similar to Jeremiah's concerning Edom (Jer. 49:7-22), it is possible and also probable that he prophesied some time during the period of Jeremiah's prophecy. It could have been just before or just after the fall of Jerusalem.

The Edomites, to whom Obadiah's prophecy was directed, were descendants of Esau. They inhabited the rocky, mountainous territory south of the Dead Sea. Sela (Petra), their capital, was situated far back in the mountain canyons and carved out of a perpendicular cliff. They considered this to be an impregnable stronghold, in which they took refuge after their raiding expeditions. They were a proud, bitter, and resentful people. Their hatred of the Israelites had stemmed from the time of the trouble between Esau and Jacob.

Obadiah I: Chastisement and Destruction of Edom

The first verse of Obadiah's prophecy is almost identical with that of Jer. 49:14. He said God would stir up the heathen nations against the Edomites to punish them for their sins against Judah. God had made Edom small, in comparison with the other nations, perhaps in respect and recognition (greatly despised) as well as in numbers. Their pride had deceived them in their feeling of safety in the clefts of the rocks, and also in their feeling of self-importance before the other nations. They were very proud of their wisdom, but God said their wise men would be destroyed.

Both Obadiah and Jeremiah prophesied that if thieves came to them, they would surely leave something. And if grape gatherers came, they would leave some for

gleaners. But God was going to completely annihilate Edom (verses 5-9; Jer. 49:9, 10).

God, through Obadiah, rebuked them for their violence against Judah, their brother Esau, the forefather of Edom, and Jacob, the forefather of Israel, were twin brothers. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, the Edomites rejoiced over Judah's downfall and took part in the cruel plundering and massacre. They stood at the cross roads to capture and deliver to Nebuchadnezzar those Jews who tried to escape. Obadiah promised Edom's complete extinction for these sins (verses 10-14).

God used the wickedness of the heathen nations to punish Israel and Judah for their sins in following the idolatrous ways of the heathens. He sought by this to turn them back to Him, the only true God and Savior. But he afterward punished the heathens, who continued in their wickedness, with complete destruction (verses 15, 16). Within a very short time after Edom helped Nebuchadnezzar destroy Judah, God used Nebuchadnezzar to defeat the Edomites and bring them out from their stronghold in the mountains, from which place God said He would bring them down (verse 14).

Obadiah, after prophesying of the destruction of Edom, prophesied of the spiritual restoration of Zion and of all Israel (the house of Jacob). He said God would make the house of Jacob a fire and the house of Joseph a flame to devour the house of Esau as stubble, until there was none remaining of the house of Esau. Before the time of Christ, Edom had been completely conquered by the Jews (the Maccabees) and absorbed into the Jewish state. The Herods, who were made rulers in Palestine by the Roman government, were Edomites. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Roman general Titus, they disappeared from history, fulfilling this prophecy.

The last of Obadiah's prophecy looks ahead of the complete spiritual restoration of Israel and of Christ's reign on earth for a thousand years.

Other Scriptures which foretold the doom of Edom are Psalm 137:1-7; Isa. 34:5-15; Jer. 49:7-22; Eze. 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Amos 1:11, 12.

Chapter Five

Jonah, The Reluctant Prophet

Introduction

Jonah was a Galilean from the town of Gath-hepher, near Nazareth. He is thought to have prophesied shortly before and during the first part of the reign of Jeroboam II over Israel, since a portion of his prophecy was fulfilled at this time. See II Kings 14:23-35. Jesus confirmed the fact of

Jonah's historical character and the story of him being swallowed by a whale (Matt. 12:40, 41). There have been many sea monsters large enough to swallow a man, but we have no need to rationalize concerning the story of Jonah, for it was purely a miracle of God. The miracle of Jonah's experience became a sing to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30).

The historical background of Jonah's prophecy is recorded in II Kings 14. He had a message for Israel, but the prophecy and history recorded in the book of Jonah concerned only Nineveh.

Jonah 1: Jonah's Commission, Disobedience and Chastening

God called Jonah to warn the wicked city of Nineveh that within forty days it would be destroyed. Jonah rebelled against this call and attempted to flee from God's presence. He went to Joppa and bought a ticket to Tarshish. Tarshish is thought to have been the same as Tartessus in Spain, about as far in the opposite direction from Nineveh as possible. He was soon to learn, however, that neither by distance nor by his attempt to stifle his conscience could he go beyond the reach of the voice of God.

The Lord immediately sent a great wind into the sea and the ship was about to be broken up. The mariners began to pray to their gods. When they found Jonah asleep, they awakened him and told him to call on his God. They then cast lots to learn who was the offender that had caused this great storm. When the lot fell on Jonah, they asked him who he was and what he had done. Jonah witnessed to them that he was a Hebrew who feared the Lord, the God of heaven who created the sea and the dry land. He also told them he had rebelled against the call of his God and was trying to run away from Him. He told them if they threw him overboard the sea would become calm.

Jonah had already begun to repent when he made his confession and became willing to die to save the men on the ship. They tried to avoid casting him into the sea, but when it continued to rage, they threw him out. When the sea immediately became calm, they feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered sacrifices and made vows to Him. The Lord, knowing the repentant attitude of Jonah, had already prepared a big fish to swallow him up.

Jonah 2: Jonah's Prayer

When Jonah found himself still alive inside the big fish, he began to pray in earnest. In this slimy place with seaweeds wrapped around his head, he thought the Lord had cast him off, but he continued to pray and repent toward His holy temple. The Lord spoke to the fish to dispatch him on dry land. Jonah then sacrificed to the Lord with

thanksgiving, promised to pay his vows, and said, "...Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).

His experience was a type of Jesus going down into hell for us and coming forth in the resurrection to give us eternal life (Eph. 4:9, 10; I Peter 3:18-22).

Jonah 3: Jonah's Second Commission and Revival

God still required Jonah to go to Nineveh. He gifts and callings are without repentance (Rom. 11:29). God cannot change His minds, for He is always right, but His actions toward men are conditioned on men's attitudes and actions. When men change their course, God changes His actions toward them.

Jonah's soul-shattering message had spread through the entire area by the time he had traveled a day's journey into Nineveh, and the people had begun to repent. His message reached the king on the throne, who immediately ordered all to dress in sackcloth and commanded a feast for men and animals. The Assyrians seem to have known that Israel's God was longsuffering, merciful, and forgiving of the repentant and our merciful God withdrew His judgment on Nineveh for the time. God cannot repent as men repent, but His actions often depend on men's actions.

Jonah 4: Jonah's Displeasure and the Mercy of God

Jonah had come to Nineveh to escape God's judgment on himself, but he did not come in a true missionary spirit. He deeply desired the destruction of the city because Nineveh had been a bitter enemy to Israel. He now sought to justify his running away from God's call on the grounds that he knew God was gracious and merciful and withheld judgment when people repented. He angrily waited in a booth on the east side of the city to see if God might yet destroy Nineveh (verses 1-5).

God asked Jonah if he did well to be angry. He then demonstrated His mercy to Jonah by causing a gourd vine to grow up quickly for a shadow over his head. He then demonstrated to Jonah what it meant to lose the mercy of God by permitting a worm to cut down the vine. Now the east wind and the sun again beat down on his head, and he became so miserable he wished he could die (verses 6-8). God, by this, showed him his selfishness in desiring his own comfort and deliverance, while he desired the destruction of all the people of Nineveh, many of whom were not responsible for the wickedness of the rulers and their mean of war (verses 9-11).

Chapter Six

Micah, The Prophet of the Oppressed

Introduction

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah but began his ministry a little while after Isaiah. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah over Judah, and during the reigns of Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea over Israel. The historical background of his prophecy is recorded in II Chron. Chapters 26 through 33, and II Kings, chapters 15, 16, and 17. He was a native of Judah, and he prophesied to both Judah and Israel. However, his prophecies mostly concerned Israel.

There was a marked resemblance between his prophecy and Isaiah's. Compare Micah 4:1-5 with Isa. 2:1-4. God, who spoke through His prophets by His Spirit, sometimes gave the same message to more than one prophet. Hezekiah's respect for Micah's prophecy later became an indirect means of saving the life of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:14-19)

Micah 1: Judgment for National Sins

Micah's first message was inspired by a vision of the Lord treading upon the high places of the earth, visiting judgment on the sinful people of Israel and Judah. He saw the judgment of God as a devouring fire before Him and as a high strong waterfall, sweeping every thing before it. This was coming on all Israel because of their transgressions. The transgressions of Israel (Jacob) originated in Samaria, the seat of their government by their kings, priests, and false prophets. This was a word picture of the fall of both Israel and Judah. Israel would fall first, but finally Judah also would go into captivity. Their land would be over run, their homes swept away from them, and their images destroyed (verses 2-7).

Micah pictures terrific wailing and mourning of the people when their kingdom should fall to their enemies. Israel had already gone so deeply into idolatry that her sin was incurable, except by captivity. Judah also had become contaminated by the idolatry of Israel (Jer. 3:6-10).

Micah told the people of Israel of the very great sorrow and mourning they would be plunged into when God's wrath was poured out on them for their sins. He said they would shave the hair from their heads as a sign of great sorrow. They would grieve as a mother would grieve for the death of her children. This was fulfilled under the reign of Hoshea, Israel's last king (II Kings 17:3-18).

Micah 2: The Sins of Judah and Israel

Micah pronounced woe on the sinful people of Israel who devised wickedness upon their beds at night and arose in the early morning to perpetrate the evil they had devised. They practiced every sin of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-21; II Tim. 3:1-5). They coveted the fields and houses of their

neighbors and devised plans in the night hours to take them by fraud or violence. The rulers and leaders of the people often took away the inheritances of the poor, for which God was going to send an evil upon them that would bring their necks under a yoke of slavery. Every family had been given an inheritance in the land God had given them, but now there would be no inheritance for any of them (verses 1-5).

Israel tried to stop the prophets from prophesying because their messages brought shame and condemnation upon them. The way of the Lord was too strait for them. They loved the broad way that permitted any thing they desired to do (Matt. 7:13, 14). However, God's word brought blessing only for those who walked uprightly. These people, who in their past had been greatly blessed of God, had become His enemies (James 4:4; Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21, 22). They had taken homes from women with children. But the homes they had taken from women and the poor would not become places of rest for them, for they were going to be destroyed with the homes (verses 6-10). God's true prophets were hated and dishonored by the rulers of Israel, but the false prophets, who told them what they wanted to hear, were the prophets of the people. Yet, even though Israel as a whole had gone so far from God, there was still a righteous remnant among them, and God promised to assemble them as the sheep of His fold. They too would need to go into captivity with the wicked, but God would go with the faithful and take care of them (verses 11-13).

Micah 3: The Sins of the Leaders

Micah pictured Israel's oppressive and mercenary princes, rulers, and false prophets, as wolves tearing the flesh of the people from their bones. Their time of trouble was coming when they would cry to the Lord for help, but He would not hear them because they had "behaved themselves ill in their doings" (verses 1-4).

False prophets had led the people into sin, which could lead only to destruction. Their only concern for the people was to make merchandise of them. They cried peace, but if the people did not "put into their mouth" (pay them their price), they prepared war against them. God promised a very dark night for the false prophets and for those whom they deceived, when there would be no answer from God (verses 5-7).

Micah declared to them that his prophecies of God's judgments to come on Judah and Israel were of the Spirit of the Lord. He condemned the rulers of both Israel and Judah for their hatred of equity and justice. They built up Zion and Jerusalem with iniquity and blood. Their rulers judged only for reward and bribe, their priests taught for hire, and their false prophets divined for money, while they contended that the Lord was for them and no evil could

come to them. But God's true message by Micah was that Jerusalem should be plowed as a field, and the mountain of the house (the temple) would become heaps (verses 8-12).

Micah 4: The Reproof of Sins and Vision of Hope

After Micah's dire message of judgment (chapter 3), he gave a message of hope to both Israel and Judah. We read in Isa. 26:9, "...When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." The people of Israel and Judah learned righteousness and the fear of the Lord in their troubles in the land of captivity. From this we can learn that there is hope for people of every age who will take heed to God's lessons of truth and righteousness from His judgments and chastisements.

Micah looked away from the dark picture of the two captivities to a brighter day in the distant future. Solomon's temple would be destroyed, but the Lord was going to build an indestructible and everlasting temple (I Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22). God's temple, which is His spiritual kingdom (Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13, 14), will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44, 45). When Jesus Christ came with the gospel of salvation for all men, many Israelites accepted Him, but Israel, as a whole, rejected Him and was cut off, as a nation, until they should accept Christ as their Lord and Savior (Rom. 11:1-6, 13-27).

This message of Micah (verses 1-8) looked away to the time of Christ's millennial reign on earth (Rev. 20:1-6). It will be a time of no war. There will be nothing to fear for the devil will be bound. The curse of sin will have been lifted from the earth (Isa. 11:1-9; 65:17-25).

It appears from the Scripture that the glorified saints of God (the bride of Christ) will reign with Him during the one thousand years (Matt. 19:27-29). They will be caught up at the coming of Christ to catch away His Church (I Cor. 15:50-57; Rev. 19:7-9), and will return with the Lord when He comes to deliver the people of Israel and destroy the armies of antichrist at the battle of Armageddon (Zech. 14:1-9; Rev. 19:11-21; 20:1-10). Israel, after their miraculous deliverance at Armageddon, will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Eze. 38:14-23; 39:17-29; Rev. 19:17-21; Isa. 25:6-9). Some Old Testament references imply that there will also be mortal people living on earth during the one thousand years reign of Christ and that birth and death will continue (Isa. 11:6; 65:20).

Micah 5: Birth of the Messiah

Micah here prophesied that the troops of Nebuchadnezzar would besiege Jerusalem, take and demolish it, and carry most of the people away to Babylon. He said "they would smite the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek" (verse 1). In the first place, this perhaps referred to the smiting of

Zedekiah, Judah's last king, but it was most certainly prophetic of the smiting of Jesus just before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:67; 27:30).

Judah was going to be smitten and carried to Babylon within about 135 or 140 years from the time of Micah's prophecy. But there was a great victory coming for them in the more distant future. Micah stands out as the only one of the prophets to foretell the place of Christ's birth (verse 2). Bethlehem Ephrathah (of Judah), about six miles south of Jerusalem, was small in comparison to many of Judah's cities, but of great importance as the birthplace of the Messiah, Israel's eternal King. The fulfillment of this prophecy is well known today (Luke 2:1-20; Matt. 2:1-12).

Micah said that God would give His people into the hands of their enemies until, through suffering, they learned faith and the fear of God, and were cured of idolatry (verse 3). However, He who was to rule Israel with an everlasting kingdom was to eternally redeem His people from sin and hell through the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 2:14-17). He was to become great unto the ends of the earth, for He would be the peace of His people, and would give them victory over all their enemies (verses 4, 5). Jesus, the promised Messiah, would come in the strength and the majesty of the name of the Lord (Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; Luke 1:26-35, 67-75).

Nevertheless, before the coming of Christ, the repentant and humbled Israelites would remain scattered among the heathen nations for a long period of time. They would be as dew from the Lord and as showers on the grass to the heathens. God made them evangelists in the lands of their captivity, through whom He demonstrated His reality and power (Dan. 2:27-30; 3:14-28; 6:3-26). He made Israel's adversaries to become their friends who honored and respected them highly. Many heathens were converted to faith in Israel's God (Ezra 1:1-3). At the time Christ came, there were many proselytes to the Jews' religion from among all the nations (Acts 2:6-12).

Micah prophesied of the transformation of the people of Israel and Judah when they, in captivity, turned back to the Lord. They would no longer use the heathen system of horses and chariots in warfare. When the remnant returned to their homeland, after seventy years in captivity, they would destroy the cities that had been defiled with altars to idols. They would give up their witchcrafts, soothsayers, and graven images and would no longer worship the work of their own hands (the gods they had made). God's vengeance and judgments on the heathens perhaps caused many of them to turn to faith in Israel's God (verses 10-15).

Micah 6: The Controversy

Micah's next message was against the religious hypocrisy of the people of Israel (verses 1-16). He reminded them of God's delivering their forefathers from Egyptian bondage, and of how He had led them by the hand of Moses, through the wilderness. He had supplied all their needs, had delivered them from their enemies, and had finally brought them into the Promised Land. Now the children of Israel still offered many sacrifices, performed many of the ceremonies of the law of Moses, and hypocritically professed to serve Jehovah, while they worshiped idols and practiced all the sins of the heathens.

The Lord was not pleased with their sacrifices and professions. Micah told them, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Verse 8)

Micah then reproved the people for their scant measure by which they sold to the needy, their false balances and bags of deceitful weights, and fraudulent business dealings. Their rich men spoke lies and were full of violence.

As punishment for their sins, the Lord would make them sick and desolate. Their food would not satisfy them; they would sow but would not be able to reap, they would tread and olives but have no anointing oil, and they would have sweet wine but not be able to drink it. A life of sin cannot satisfy. The people of Israel would not be able to enjoy the things they sought because they lived by the standards and statutes of Omri and the house of Ahab (I Kings 16:25-33).

Micah 7: The Voice of the Remnant

Micah felt forlorn because there were no upright men in Israel with whom to fellowship (verse 1). He longed for the first ripe fruit (of righteousness), but the land was as empty of righteousness as the fields were after the grape gleanings. There seemed to be no good men left in the land, and the wicked did not trust one another. Every man was out to get all he could from every other man, even his brother. In their greedy, selfish, and sinful lives, they earnestly did evil with both hands. No one would perform a service without being paid an exorbitant fee. The best of them were as briars and thorn hedges, so they were ripe for the visitation of God's judgment. No one could be trusted, not even members of one's own household (verses 1-6).

Jesus seems to have sent the twelve disciples, whom He had chosen to become His, apostles, to evangelize in a like situation (Matt. 10:16-22). We can understand that the great day of God's judgment on the world is close, because there are so many places that so aptly fit Micah's description of wickedness.

Thank God, we, like the prophet Micah, can look to the Lord and wait for the God of our salvation. He will hear us (verse 7).

In spite of the wickedness of Israel in the time of Micah's prophecy, there was always a remnant of faith among the people. The faithful must go into captivity and suffer with the wicked, but they had the hope of God's promises to bring them through. Many who went into captivity in wickedness repented and came to the Lord from Assyria and many other places, from sea to sea and mountain-to-mountain, wherever they had been scattered among the nations (verses 7-13).

God led the flock of His heritage with His rod (of chastisement) by which many were brought back into the fold. He promised to lead them out of bondage again, as He did when they came out of Egypt. The nations would again see God's power working among His people and they would be afraid (verses 14-17).

In due time, God would come to His people and to the world, through Christ, to redeem them from their iniquities and to give them His power of life in the Holy Ghost. By the power of the Holy Ghost, they would be able to subdue their iniquities. Our God is a God of compassion and mercy, longing to forgive when people will turn from wickedness and ask for mercy (verses 18-20). God has fulfilled His promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:16).

Chapter Seven

Nahum, The Prophet of Assyria

Introduction

Nahum is thought to have begun prophesying during the reign of Hezekiah over Judah, probably a little after the captivity of Israel by Assyria. He certainly prophesied some time between the time of Jonah's going to Nineveh and the fall of Nineveh to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. All we know of his early life is that he was a native of Elkosh, a village believed to have been in the Province of Galilee. The historical background of his prophecy is probably found in I Kings, chapters 18 through 20, and II Chron., chapters 29 through 32.

The subject of his entire prophesies as the destruction of Nineveh. His prophecy was a sequel to that of Jonah. Because Nineveh had returned to her former wickedness and cruelty, the judgment that God withheld during the preaching of Jonah would soon be executed. The purpose of Nahum's prophecy was not to warn Nineveh again, but to assure the Jews that God would protect them from the threat of an Assyrian attack. Assyria had already taken Israel captive, and Judah was apprehensive of her warlike attitude toward Jerusalem. However, God assured them,

through Nahum, that Assyria and its capital Nineveh would soon be destroyed.

Nahum 1: The Sentence of Nineveh

In Jonah's time God was shown to be merciful, gracious, kind, and slow to anger (Jonah 4:2). Nahum pictured Him as being slow to anger (verse 3) but also as a jealous God who will not acquit the guilty. His wrath is not executed speedily, but when people repeatedly trample His mercy they will surely be punished. Assyria had returned to her wicked and cruel ways and God's judgment was not to be executed. God is good, kind and a stronghold for His people, but eventually He will make an end of His enemies (verses 7, 8). Nahum assured the Jews that God would not lift His punishment of Assyria a second time (verse 9), as He had when they repented at the warning of Jonah.

Verses 11-14 seem to refer to God's miraculous deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian invasion of Sennacherib in answer to Hezekiah's prayers (II Kings 18:17-37; 19:1-37).

Nahum then repeated God's promise of salvation in Christ (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15), and cautioned the Jews to keep their solemn feasts and perform their vows to God, that they might be ready to receive Him when he came (verse 15).

Nahum 2: The Assault Upon Nineveh and Its Fall

Verse 1 referred to Assyria's cruelty. Nahum pictured Assyria as a lion tearing its prey into pieces. Its kings were said to enact vicious atrocities and mutilations against their prisoners.

Verse 2 referred to Gods' permitting Assyria to empty (carry away) and mar His vine (Israel). Verses 3-13 are a description of the destruction of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Nineveh is said to have been protected by five walls and three moats (canals) between the walls. Its main wall was 100 feet high and wide enough for three chariots to drive abreast over its top. However, a few years after Nahum's prophecy the Babylonians and Medes besieged the city, and during which a sudden rise in the Tigris River washed away a part of the walls (the gates of the river were opened). The besieging army marched in through this breach and destroyed the city of Nineveh. Its destruction was so complete that for many centuries its ancient site was unknown. But in 1849 to 1854 archaeologists uncovered the ruins of the magnificent palaces of several Assyrian kings, including that of Sennacherib, which was said to be the most magnificent of all. It was Sennacherib's army that invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (II Kings 18:13-37; 19:1-36).

Nahum 3: The Complete Ruin of Nineveh

This prophecy of Nahum was a perfect description of the destruction of Nineveh, which would soon be fulfilled just as the prophet described it. God visited upon this bloody city the woe it had deserved for its wicked cruelties. When the horsemen on prancing horses and the jumping chariots of the Babylonian armies broke into the city through the breach in the walls, they seem to have made quick work of the devastation. And due to wicked and cruel, there was none to bemoan her fate (verse 7). Perhaps the last verse of this chapter sums up the feelings of all the nations toward the capital city of the cruel Assyrians. "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually" (verse 19). When God laid His hand of judgment on Nineveh, her strong men became weak as women and all her defenses collapsed (verse 13).

Chapter Eight

Habakkuk, The Prophet of Complaint And Faith

Introduction

The Scripture tells us nothing concerning Habakkuk except that he was a prophet. We may learn much, however, concerning his faith, personality, and character, as well as of the problems of his time, by his writing. By the problems, which he dealt with, we judge that he was probably contemporary with Jeremiah, and seems to have prophesied shortly before the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, probably during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. He referred to God's raising up the Chaldeans to punish His people for their sins. Thus, II Kings 23, 24 and 25 and II Chron. 36 could be the historical background for his prophecy.

Habakkuk 1: Habakkuk's Complaints

Habakkuk expressed a conflict of faith over God's seeming indifference toward Judah's extreme violence and sinfulness. The Lord caused him to see the iniquity of the people, that he might become deeply concerned, but as yet, He had not punished them (verses 1-4). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel described Judah's idolatrous condition at this time (Jer. 23:9-14; Eze. 8:1-18). Habakkuk asked how long he should cry against the iniquity and violence of the people, which God seemingly delayed to punish.

God answered that He would use the bitter and dreadful Chaldeans to punish His people (verses 5-11). This answer gave Habakkuk an even greater conflict of faith. He could not understand why God would permit a people as wicked and violent as the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to

punish His people, who, in spite of their sins, were more righteous than the Chaldeans. He reminded the Lord that it was the heathens who were ordained for punishment, not His people. He also reminded the Lord that the Chaldeans had no respect for the people of other nations but hunted them as if they were wild beasts (verses 12-17).

Habakkuk 2: God's Answer

Habakkuk must have been amazed at himself for taking issue with God what He purposed to do. Nevertheless, he determined to continue at his post of duty as watchman over the Lord's people until he should hear what the Lord would say to him. He expected to be reprov'd and wondered how he should answer the Lord. The Lord did not reprove him, however, but simply answered His prophet's honest conflict of faith.

God answered Habakkuk by a vision and told him to write it down carefully so that all who read it might run for safety. The vision was of the destruction of Babylon (Chaldea). The ambition of this great kingdom was to conquer all the other nations and be a world ruler. God was going to use this kingdom to punish the sinful people of Judah, but after a period of time he was going to destroy Babylon. He told Habakkuk to wait for the fulfillment of the vision for it would surely come in God's own time (verses 2-13).

After God had used this wicked and covetous kingdom to punish His people, He promised that he would bring His people through to a glorious salvation. He looked ahead to a time when the earth should be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (verse 14).

Verses 15-19 are a message of reproof and condemnation to the Jews for their idolatry. The woe that was coming to them would be their captivity by Babylon. Their idols of wood, gold, and silver could not save them, for there was no breath in them (verse 19; Psalm 115:2-9). The Lord can, however, always be found in His holy temple by the upright and the repentant (verse 20).

Habakkuk 3: Habakkuk's Prayer and Praise

At the end of God's message concerning the coming destruction of Babylon, and His chastisement of Judah, Habakkuk burst out in a prayer of praise to Him. His questions had been answered and his doubts were all gone. He praised God for all His past blessings on the people of Israel and attributed to Him all power over His creation. Then he expressed the triumph of his faith in verses 17-19. He would henceforth trust the Lord through all circumstances or adversities.

Chapter Nine

Zephaniah, The Orator

Introduction

Zephaniah may have been a descendant of Hezekiah (verse 1). He was contemporary with Jeremiah. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah and shortly before Habakkuk. His prophecies were concerned mostly with God's judgment to come on many nations who had mistreated the people of Israel, and particularly with His judgment to come on Judah for her sins, and the fall of Jerusalem. He pictured these events in the very bleakest terms. The historical background of his prophecy is found in II Kings 22 and 23, and II Chron. 34 and 35).

Zephaniah 1: The Day of Judgment

Zephaniah pronounced God's judgment on all the wicked, especially the idolaters (verses 2-6). Men, beasts, fowls, and fishes would be consumed from off the land, perhaps in warfare. This would also include Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He especially condemned those who worshiped Baal, and the priests of Baal (Chemarims). Also mentioned were those who professed to worship Jehovah along with their worship of idols. There were some who had deliberately turned from worshiping the Lord, and still others who had shown no interest in seeking the Lord.

Josiah was the last good king over Judah. The two kings before him had been evil as were those after him to the fall of Jerusalem.

Josiah had the temple repaired, and in its renovation they found the book of the law of Moses. The king read the law to all the priests, prophets, and people. He destroyed idolatry and kept the Passover feast. But after his death, the people lapsed back into all the sins of idolatry. This message of Zephaniah may have come at the beginning of Josiah's reign or just after the people's lapse of faith.

Zephaniah, in verses 7-18, prophesied of God's judgment on Judah and the fall of Jerusalem. He told the people of Judah the day of God's judgment was at hand. The Lord's sacrifice spoke of the blood shed and death at the taking of Jerusalem. At this time God's punishment of Judah's princes, king, and the king's children would be executed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. His punishment would also fall on all who were in strange clothing (all who worshipped idols had doubtless taken on the lifestyle and the manner of dress of the heathens). The leaping on the threshold, mentioned in verse 9, was perhaps a heathen custom.

There would be great mourning when the Babylonians broke into the city and began destroying every thing. The

merchants of Maktesh (bazaar) mourned over the destruction of their stores and wares. There would be no escape, for God would search Jerusalem with candles and punish the men who were settled on their lees (as dregs settled on the bottom of a vessel of wine) in complacency. The sinful Jews tried to tell themselves that the Lord would neither do good or evil.

Zephaniah indicated the imminence of Judah's captivity by telling them they would not be able to inhabit the houses they were building nor reap the fruit of the vineyards they were planting. Zephaniah painted a dark picture indeed. It would be a day of wrath, trouble, distress, desolation, gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. Neither would they be able to buy their freedom with their silver and gold.

Zephaniah 2: The Day of Judgment for the Nations

Zephaniah pleaded with the people to gather and seek the Lord and His righteousness that they might be hid (protected) in the day of His anger (verses 1-3). There was always a righteous remnant of faith in God, and He took care of them.

In verses 4-15, Zephaniah pronounced God's judgment on a number of the heathen nations, including Assyria of whom it was said that Nineveh would be made desolation. We have just studied Nahum's prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh by the Babylonians, who were led by Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians were moving against many nations about this time, with the goal of ruling the world. And God used them to punish these nations who had been enemies to Israel and Judah.

Zephaniah 3: The Day of Judgment for Jerusalem

When the Babylonians began to overrun the heathen nations, it should have been a warning to Judah to turn to Jehovah in repentance, but they obeyed not the voice of the prophets and rejected the lessons of the Lord. Zephaniah here described the level of sin to which Judah had fallen. Her princes were like roaring lions and her judges like evening wolves that killed their prey and left the bones till tomorrow. Her prophets were treacherous and her priests polluted the sanctuary doing violence to the law of God. God continued to warn them through His prophets and to punish their enemies, hoping they would repent so He would not have to destroy them. But they continued to corrupt themselves until there was no remedy (verses 1-7). See II Chron. 36:15-21.

After God had given Zephaniah His message of judgment against the nations, Israel and Judah, he, who knows the beginning from the end (Isa. 46:9, 10), gave him His message of hope for the world. He looked away to the time of the end when the entire world, good and bad, would

receive their just dues. He called on the people of Israel to wait until He had punished the nations for their rejection of the Redeemer (verse 8). This verse refers to God's judgment on the sinful nations under the leadership of the antichrist at the battle of Armageddon (Zech. 12:1-10; 14:1-9; Rev. 19:11-21). When Jesus came to make redemption possible for all men, thousands of Jews believed on Him and were filled with His Spirit after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. Most of the early Church was Israelites, but Israel, as a nation, rejected their Lord and Savior. Individuals of the Jewish people have accepted Christ in every age since then, but as a race of people, they have continued to reject Him to the present time. Nevertheless, these prophecies show that Israel, as a nation, will accept the Lord when He defends them at the battle of Armageddon (Isa. 25:6-9).

(Verses 9-15): In that day the Lord will turn to the people a pure language (truth). Those who attempted to build the tower of Babel set the course for a world of people who imagined they could attain heaven by their own works and in their own way. But the Lord confounded their language to divide them. And they went in all directions (Gen. 11:1-9). This has been the result of all evil works from the beginning (Dan. 2:40-45). Yet when men accept God's truth the His way, they will find that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). They will then make Him their choice and serve Him with one consent.

When Israel accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be sealed with the Holy Ghost just as all His Church has been (Eph. 1:12-14; 4:30). Their sins will be taken away when they receive the gift of righteousness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 5:17). They will no longer be haughty by reason of being God's chosen people in the Old Testament regime, but will trust only in the name of the Lord.

Verses 14-20 speaks of the glory that all the redeemed will come into in the millennial reign of Christ on earth, and in the resurrection to eternal life. We have already dealt with the millennial reign, as prophesied of by several of the prophets. But I am sure, that with our finite minds, we cannot imagine the glories awaiting all God's saints who are faithful to the end (Rom. 8:18; II Tim. 4:7, 8; I Peter 1:3-13). The hope of the faithful is found in the words of the Psalmist, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73:24, 25).

Chapter Ten

Haggai, The Prophet of Temple Building

Introduction

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are called post-exilic prophets because they prophesied after a remnant of the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. The historical background for Haggai's prophecy is found in Ezra 5 and 6.

He was commissioned to encourage the Jews to resume building the temple. Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, with the people, had laid the foundation of the temple in the second year after their return to Jerusalem from Babylon (Ezra 3:8-13), about 536 B.C. But soon after the foundation was laid, the Samaritans succeeded in influencing Artaxerxes (successor to Cyrus) to command them to cease building (Ezra 4:1-24). And for sixteen years, till the reign of Darius over Persia, the temple had remained unfinished.

Haggai 1: An Appeal to Build the Temple

Sixteen years after Zerubbabel had been forced to cease building the temple, he was now under the rule of Darius of Persia. But he still had made no attempt to learn if it might be possible to resume building. During those sixteen years, the Jews had become occupied with building and beautifying their own homes, and had become indifferent toward the house of the Lord. To punish them for this attitude, the Lord had caused them to suffer much adversity. They reaped only a small yield from their farms. They had not enough food, drink, or clothing, and their wages melted away as if it had been put in bags with holes. The Lord then sent Haggai to show them the reason for their lack of prosperity.

The Lord then spoke to them through Haggai, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; consider your ways" (Haggai 1:4, 5).

He told them that when they brought their produce and their wages home, the Lord blew upon it so they did not realize the benefits they needed. He had caused a drought upon their land.

Then the Lord stirred up the spirits of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, and the people, so they resumed building. Their enemies again tried to hinder the work and sent a letter to Darius. When Darius searched the records and found the decree which Cyrus had made concerning the building of the house of God at Jerusalem, he not only commanded them to let the work on the house of God go ahead, but ordered them to help the Jews on the expense of building out of the tribute money they were required to send to Darius (Ezra 5:1-17; 6:1-14). Haggai told them the Lord would be with them if they would resume building, and the lord did prosper them.

Haggai 2: Messages of Comfort and Assurance

Haggai's second message (verses 1-9) was given to prevent discouragement over the fact that this temple would fall far short of the magnificence of Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:10-13). He promised that this house would be glorious by reason of the presence of the Lord. But the underlying meaning was that Zerubbabel's temple would be a type of the temple Christ would build (Eph. 2:19-22), in which He would dwell in His people in the Holy Ghost. When the foundation of Zerubbabel's temple was laid, the old men who had been in Jerusalem before Solomon's temple was destroyed wept because they knew this temple could never compare with Solomon's temple in beauty and grandeur (Ezra 3:12, 13). However, it was essential that this temple be built to serve the people until Christ should come to establish His spiritual temple. And the Lord gave Haggai this message to encourage the people to continue with the building (verses 1-5).

Haggai told the people that a little while in the future the Lord would shake heaven, the earth, the sea, the dry land, and the entire nations. This referred to the first coming of Christ to earth to die for the sins of the entire world if they would believe on Him. The coming of Christ to earth was the most momentous event in all the history of the human race. Jesus said if He were lifted up from the earth, He would draw all men unto Him (John 12:32). God's shaking of the earth began with the earthly ministry of Jesus, but increased in volume after His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. We have only to study the book of Acts to see the fulfillment of this prophecy. From the day of Pentecost to the present time people of all nations have been stirred to seek the Lord Jesus Christ and have been filled with the glory of His Spirit. God's saints have been filled with His glory in the Holy Ghost as the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon's temple were filled with His glory (verses 6-9).

The Lord told Haggai to ask two questions of the priests, the answers to which gave him a third message for the people. He asked if one with holy (sanctified) flesh in the skirt (as a pocket) of his garment touched other flesh or bread, would it become holy? The priest answered, No. He then asked if one who was unclean (ceremonially) by reason of having touched a dead body, would he, by touching any of these make them unclean? The priest answered that they would be unclean. (Holiness is not contagious, but sin is.) Haggai taught the people, by this example, that they, being unclean by reason of the insincerity of their worship, had influenced others and had brought the judgment of God upon themselves. But now that they had repented and were building the house of God, He would again bless and prosper them (verses 10-19).

Haggai's last message (verses 20-23) was a prophecy of the defeat of all worldly kingdoms, especially the last world kingdom headed by the antichrist, at which time God will restore the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6-8). Zerubbabel was here named as a type of Christ (Zech. 4:5-10; Isa. 42:1-8). He had laid the foundation of the temple they were building (Ezra 3:8-13), and would finish it, as a type of Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2), who was going to build His spiritual temple.

Chapter Eleven

Zechariah, the Prophet of Inspiration and Hope

Introduction

Zechariah's mission, as well as the historical background for his prophecy, was similar to that of Haggai (Ezra 5 and 6). However, Zechariah's prophecies were concerned more with the coming of the Messiah to build a spiritual temple than with the building of Zerubbabel's temple, which was only a type of the future spiritual temple.

The Apostle Peter has given us a splendid view of the inspiration and the ministry of the Old Testament prophets:

"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

What a wonderful privilege is ours to be a part of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Zechariah 1: Visions of the Horseman and the Four Horns

Zechariah began prophesying two months after Haggai gave his first message (Zech. 1:1; Haggai 1:1). He warned the people against ignoring the word of God, given by the prophets, as their forefather had done before the captivity (verses 2-6). Their forefathers had afterward confessed that their disobedience had brought them into captivity (verse 6).

Zechariah received most of his messages from the Lord in visions. His first vision (verses 7-17) was of riders on horses. The horse symbolized warfare by which God would conquer His enemies. The riders of the other horses

were angels whom He had sent through the earth, indicating that He had his hand on the affairs of the nations. The earth was quiet from war at this time since the Medo-Persian Empire had conquered most of the world. But the Lord revealed to Zechariah that he would punish the heathen nations for their punishment of His people Israel, and would eventually restore the kingdom of Israel.

The conversation between the angel of the Lord and the Lord (verses 12, 13) went back to the seventy years period of Judah's captivity in Babylon. The angel asked the Lord how long would He not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. The Lord answered him with good and comfortable words. Then the angel told Zechariah to cry to the people of Judah that He was jealous for Jerusalem and Zion and was sore displeased with the heathen. This perhaps referred to the time they had commanded the Jews to stop the building of the temple. The Lord said He had returned to Jerusalem with mercies and His house (the temple) should be built, the cities should prosper, and the Lord would again choose Jerusalem (verses 14-17).

The four horns of Zechariah's second vision (verses 19, 20) symbolize the nations that had scattered the people of Israel from their homeland. Perhaps these were four world kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:37-45), the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires. Horns, in prophecy, symbolize the power of kings and kingdoms (Dan. 8:3, 4, 20; Rev. 17:12). The Lord's power in bringing salvation to His people is also symbolized by horns (II Sam. 22:3; Habakk. 3:3, 4; Luke 1:69; Rev. 5:6). Then the Lord showed him four carpenters (verses 20, 21), which He explained were the horns (powers) that he would use to cast out the horns of the Gentiles who had taken the land of Israel and scattered its people.

Zechariah 2: Vision of the Man with the Measuring Line

The third vision (verses 1-13) was a man with a measuring line, who said he had come to measure Jerusalem. He told Zechariah that the city would be inhabited as towns without walls for the Lord would be as a wall of fire around her and His glory would be in the midst of her. Not only was the Lord going to call His people out of Babylon back to their homeland, but also He was going to redeem them, by the sacrifice of Christ, and put His glory within them. He would spoil the nations that had spoiled Israel, for they had touched the apple of His eye. However the redemption which Christ wrought for Israel, was also for all people who would come to Him. Many from all nations shall be joined to Him in the New Jerusalem.

Zechariah 3: Vision of Joshua and the Adversary

The fifth vision (verses 1-7) was of Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed in filthy garments with Satan, standing at his right hand to resist him. But the Lord rebuked Satan, and told him that Jerusalem was a brand plucked out of the fire. This vision portrayed the redemption of garments was a type of Christ taking our sins on Himself to pay our penalty of death that we might have life in Him (II Cor. 5:21). The Lord rebuked (defeated) Satan's attempt to destroy Christ (Matt. 2:1-16; Rev. 12:3-10). The fair mitre placed on the head of Joshua typified the helmet of salvation, which Christ would procure for men (Isa. 59:17; Eph. 6:17). He takes away our filthy garments of sin and clothes us with the robe of His righteousness (Isa. 61:10; Rev. 3:5, 18; 19:7, 8).

The sixth vision (verses 8-10) pictured Christ as the BRANCH (the Son of David). Isaiah also pictured the Christ as the BRANCH (Isa. 4:2-5; 11:1-4). He is that Rock on which the Church was founded (Matt. 16:15-18; I Cor. 10:4; Isa. 32:2). The seven eyes upon the Stone before Joshua symbolized his omniscience of Christ (Zech. 4:10; Rev. 5:6). Only through the Lord Jesus Christ could Israel hope to have their iniquities removed and their inheritance restored.

Zechariah 4: Visions of the Golden Candlestick and the Olive Trees

Zechariah seventh vision was of the golden lamp stand (candlestick) with its seven lamps, which were fed with oil in its bowl. There was an olive tree on either side of the lampstand, with a golden pipe attached to each tree (verse 12). The golden lampstand which had stood in the tabernacle and in the temple, which was to be, kept always burning (Exo. 27:20, 21), was a type of the New Testament Church (Rev. 1:12-20). The Church is God's light and His witness to the world (Matt. 5:14-16; Acts 1:8).

Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple and the Lord said his hands should finish it. This was important because it was a type of the Lord Jesus building the spiritual temple (the Church). But God said he would not build it by his might or power but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts (verse 6). The angel told Zechariah that this was the interpretation of the vision of the candlestick and the olive trees. He said they should see the plummet (the Lord's plumbline – Isa. 28:17) in the hands of Zerubbabel and those seven (the seven eyes of the Lord) who sees every one and every situation in the whole world (II Chron. 16:9). It is the Lord working in and through His Church today to bring the gospel of His salvation to the whole world.

Zechariah then asked, "... What are these two olive trees...." And the Lord answered, "...These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (verse 14). The olive trees, with golden pipes by which to

empty the golden oil out of themselves, symbolized God's two-fold witness and testimony by which He is bringing the gospel of salvation to the whole world. The Holy Ghost working through God's Spirit-filled saints is the two-fold witness. This gospel must be preached in the entire world for a witness to all nations (Matt. 24:14). And it must be spread by the two-fold witness of the Holy Ghost working through human instrumentality (John 5:30-32; 8:12-18; 15:26, 27; Acts 1:8; 2:32; 4:8-10; 5:29-32). The Lord Jesus, through the instrument of His body, the Church, is sending forth the testimony of His gospel to the world (I Cor. 2:1-5; I Peter 4:10, 11).

Zechariah 5: Visions of the Flying Roll and the Woman and the Ephah

Zechariah's eighth vision (verses 1-4) was of a flying roll or scroll on which undoubtedly was written God's righteous law and His penalty for sin (Exo. 19:1-17). Paul called the penalty of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23), the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). All who refuse the mercy of Christ and refuse to obey His righteous law must pay the penalty of death. The two sins, stealing and swearing, were probably meant to represent the whole law. The sin of stealing represented those sins committed against men, and the sin of swearing represented those sins committed against God. Jesus said:

"...Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black" (Matt. 5:34-36).

All unrepentant sinners, at the end of their mortal life, must pay the penalty of sin, not just physical death but eternal separation from God, cast out into the devil's hell.

Zechariah's ninth vision (verses 5-11) was of an ephah measure containing a woman on which God clamped a lid of a talent of lead and caused it to be carried by two women on the wings of the wind into the land of Shinar (Babylon). The woman (wickedness) within the ephah represented Israel's cup of idolatry, which was full and ripe for judgment, for which God would cause them to be carried to Babylon. The people to whom Zechariah prophesied had returned from Babylon, cured of idolatry in a measure, but they had not been cleansed from the nature of sin, which had led them into such wickedness. They could only be cleansed through redemption in Christ.

Zechariah 6: Vision of the Four Chariots

Zechariah's tenth vision (verses 1-8) was of four chariots drawn by red, black, white, grised, and bay horses. Verse 5 identifies these as representing God's ministering angels

(Luke 1:19; Heb. 1:14). Chariots and horses were most generally associated with warfare in Old Testament times, especially among the heathen nations. God sent His angels to minister judgment against the nations that had mistreated His people Israel. In Rev. 6:2-8, the white horse symbolized the Lord, going forth conquering and to conquer, the red horse represented war, the black horses represented famine, and the bay and grised horses represented death (the wages of sin) by many and varied means. The wicked must die the second death (Rev. 20:14), but all who are made righteous through Christ will live eternally. The quieting of God's Spirit was the fulfillment of divine judgment.

The Lord told Zechariah to assign three Jew who had come from Babylon to make two crowns of silver and gold, and set them on the head of Joshua, the high priest. They were then to speak to Joshua, saying,

"...Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (verses 12, 13).

This was prophetic of the double office of King and High Priest, which Jesus was to occupy in His spiritual kingdom (Heb. 7:1-3, 11-22). In the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament, God ordained that their kings should come from the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David, but their priests should come from the tribe of Levi and the lineage of Aaron. However, the Lord Jesus Christ, as typified by Joshua in verses 11-13, is our eternal King and High Priest. The gold and silver crowns, having served their purpose, were to be put in the temple for a memorial (verse 14).

All the Gentile nations, which at that time were far off from the Lord (Eph. 2:11-22), were to be included in His new covenant of grace. He died on the cross, arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, not to save Israel alone, but those of faith from all races and nations of people (verse 15).

Zechariah 7: Rebuke for Formalism

A delegation was sent to the place of worship to inquire of the priests to what extent they should continue to observe the ceremonial fasting they had observed in the land of captivity (verses 1-3). The Lord told Zechariah to tell them that their fasting had been ceremonial rather than in a spirit of true heart repentance. Many of them still possessed the same spirit of greed and of oppressing the poor, of which the prophets had warned them before the

fall of Jerusalem. They had been scattered among the nations because they had refused to heed God's call to execute justice and to show mercy and compassion. Now Zechariah warned them against reverting to the practices of their fathers before their captivity. When their fathers had finally cried to the Lord in their trouble, it was too late. The Lord would not hear them but scattered them, as by a whirlwind, among the nations (verses 4-14).

Zechariah 8: Glorious Regathering of Israel

The Lord again spoke to Zechariah and told him that He had visited His wrath in the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon because He had great jealousy for the people of Zion. But since many of them had repented and learned faith and righteousness in their captivity, He had returned to Jerusalem with those who had returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel. He had reproved them by Haggai for their lack of zeal for the temple, he promised to bless and prosper them. However, the promises of verses 1-8 reaches much further into the future than the blessing of prosperity for their present revival of zeal. They involved the blessings of salvation in Christ when many of them would accept Him and be spiritually restored. Many of both Israel and Judah had continued to return to their homeland from their various places of captivity until, at the time of Christ's coming, the land of Palestine was virtually inhabited by Israelites and Gentiles, who had become proselytes to the Jewish faith.

The Lord, through Zechariah, continued to encourage the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the surrounding area to follow the commandments of the Lord and to build the temple (verses 9-19). They had once been a curse among the heathens, and a reproach to the name of the Lord, but He would save them and make them a blessing. God had punished them in their captivity, but now He was going to do well to Jerusalem and the house of Judah. He then told them how they should conduct themselves: they should speak the truth to their neighbors, execute the judgment of peace and truth, they must not imagine evil against a neighbor or love a false oath. These were the things that the Lord hated.

The Lord told them that the fasts of memorial and mourning, which they had observed during the time of their captivity, should now become feasts of joy and gladness by reason of their thanksgiving.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, which was first preached in Jerusalem to the people of Israel on the day of Pentecost, was destined to spread into all nations (verses 20-23). Although the rulers of the Jews rejected Jesus and His gospel, the first missionaries to take the gospel to the Gentiles were Jews (Acts 1:8; 8:1, 4-6; 10:34, 35; 13:42, 43, 46; Rom. 3:29).

Zechariah 9: Grecian Rule

This prophecy (verses 1-8) seems to belong to the time of the conquest of Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persian Empire about 330 B. C. and reigned over it till his death. He is said to have treated the Jews well, giving them religious freedom and government by their high priests. Perhaps God used him to punish the tribes mentioned in this passage for their mistreatment of the Israelites. When Alexander marched through the land, making conquest of the various sections of the Persian Empire, God encamped about His people and protected them.

Verse 9 is very clearly a prophecy of the coming of Christ to earth, especially His riding into Jerusalem on an ass when He was heralded by many as their King, the son of David (Matt. 21:1-10; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-40; John 12:12-16). By this the Lord sought to keep the people of Israel looking forward to the coming of their Messiah.

However, most of those who heralded Him as King were looking only for an earthly king to wrestle them from Roman rule and restore their kingdom. He showed in the next few verses that His people would no longer be delivered from their enemies by natural warfare, but that He would speak peace to the heathens. He said His dominion would be from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth.

By the blood of the (new) covenant, the blood of Christ, He would set those prisoners of faith free from the bondage of sin and Satan. He implored them to turn to the stronghold (the Lord, Jer. 16:19-21), the called them prisoners of hope (verses 11, 12).

Verses 13-17 may refer, in the first place, to Judah's victories during the Maccabean struggle with the Grecians. But those victories only typified God's delivering them from the power of sin by the new birth of the Holy Spirit in Christ. He said, "...They shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar" (verse 15). See Acts 2:1-16.

Zechariah 10: The Future Strengthening of Judah

The interpretation of verse 1 is found in Hosea 6:3 and Joel 2:23-29. As God had blessed Israel with the former and latter rain on their crops, He was going to bless them spiritually with the rain of His Spirit (Acts 2:14-21). The Lord had blessed the seed of Abraham when they had obeyed His commandments, but He had struggled with them by chastisements and judgments because of their idolatries over the centuries. However, He would finally make the faithful victorious through the anointing of His Spirit (verses 2-8). See Jer. 31:31-34; Eze. 36:25-27; Titus 2:14; and I Peter 1:18-23.

The people of Israel, after their religious leaders had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, would again be dispersed among all nations. This was fulfilled in 70 A. D. by the Romans. However, God has promised to fully restore them in the end time, when they will repent and accept Jesus as their God and Savior (verses 9-12).

Zechariah 11: The First Advent of the Messiah

Zechariah continued to prophesy of conditions at the time of the coming of Christ. He seems to describe, in verses 1-6, the attitude of the religious leaders of the Jews toward Jesus, the Christ. They were said to be possessors of the common people, whom the Lord called, "the flock of the slaughter" because they were exploited by their leaders. Jesus said of them, that they were as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:35, 36). Jesus also confirmed the fulfillment of this prophecy (Matt. 23:1-15).

These leaders of the Jews (priests, elders, and members of the Sanhedrin) opposed Jesus during His entire earthly ministry and finally prevailed on Pilate to crucify Him. And again, for their sin of rejecting their Messiah, the Lord said He would deliver them into the hands of their neighbors (neighboring nations), and into the hands of their king.

When Jesus came, He would feed the flock of the slaughter. Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20), recognized the two divisions of the people of Israel: the ruling class, who rejected Jesus, and the common people, who heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). The Lord chose two staves (staffs): Beauty, to represent the ruling class, and Bands, to represent those of faith who received Him. He broke Beauty so that He might break the covenant of law, which God had made with all Israel at Sinai, and cast them off from being His people (Heb. 8:6-13) as a nation.

Zechariah then prophesied that the ruling class (Beauty) would sell the Lord. Judas fulfilled this when he bargained with the Jewish leaders for thirty pieces of silver and they gladly paid him his price that they might crucify the Lord of glory (Acts 3:14, 15). When Judas, in remorse, refused to keep the money, the chief priest, knowing it was unlawful to put it back into the treasury, used it to purchase the potters field (verses 7-13; Matt. 27:3-10).

The Lord cut asunder the staff Bands that He might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. Israel perhaps represented the group that rejected Jesus their Messiah, and Judah, those who received the Lord and were baptized by one Spirit into His body (verse 14). The righteous remnant that believed in and followed Jesus became His body, the Church (Eph. 5:19-23).

Verses 15-17 described God's judgment that would come on the mercenary and hypocritical religious leaders in the time of Christ. Ezekiel described a like situation in the days when God's judgment was upon the Jews and Jerusalem (Eze. 34:1-10). Judah's leaders (false shepherds) had caused the people to go astray from the Lord. Zechariah prophesied that the same spirit would exist among the rulers when Christ was on earth. The Lord, through Zechariah, pronounced woe on such leaders. Jesus pronounced woe on those of His time (Matt. 23:23-36).

Zechariah 12: Deliverance by the Messiah

Verses 1-14 of this chapter is a prophecy of the end time, when a great army of men from all nations, under the leadership of the Beast – also called the man of sin and the antichrist will march against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-3; Joel 3:2). This will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. The Lord will fight for Israel by His miraculous power, as He had fought for them many times in their past history. He will also give the people of Israel miraculous power against their enemies. By this miraculous power, they will recognize Jesus Christ as their God and Savior (Isa. 25:6-9). As they accept the Lord Jesus, He will pour on them the spirit of grace and supplication. There will be a great mourning among them in their repentance (verses 11-14).

Zechariah 13: Purging by the Messiah

When Israel accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior, at the battle of Armageddon, they will be sealed with the Holy Spirit of the new covenant (Eph. 1:13, 14; Rev. 7:2-8). This is the fountain opened to the house of David for all sin and uncleanness (verse 1). Only then will Israel be cleansed of all her idolatries and iniquities (verse 2-5). At that time, they will become conscious of the wounds He suffered, the blood He shed, and the price he paid for their salvation (verses 6, 7).

Verse 8 probably refers to Israel's troubles with other nations before the time of Armageddon, and some of them will die. But the Lord will bring all those, whom He foreknows will accept Him, through the fire of tribulation. He will refine them as gold, and when they call on His name, He will say, "...It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (verse 9).

Zechariah 14: Victory by the Messiah

Verses 1-8 are a graphic description of the battle of Armageddon, when Jesus shall destroy His enemies and save His people Israel. Prior to the battle of Armageddon, the Lord will have raptured His Church into the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9), after which His glorified saints will return with Him when He comes to fight the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21). When the devil is

bound, the curse will be lifted from the earth, and Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords (verses 9-11).

Verses 12-15 evidently describe the battle between the Lord and His people and the forces of the antichrist. Perhaps the enemy will attempt to use nuclear warfare. But when these evil forces are completely destroyed, the Lord will begin His millennial reign (verses 16-21). We also have a picture of this period in Isa. 11-1:9.

Chapter Twelve

Malachi, The Prophet of Rebuke

Introduction

Nehemiah is the last book of Old Testament history and Malachi is the last book of Old Testament prophecy. Nehemiah is evidently the historical background for Malachi's prophecy.

The people of Israel, in spite of their repentance during the period of their captivity, continued to backslide from obedience to God's word. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal their periods of backsliding. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi reproved their many sins. Malachi pictured them an outwardly religious but inwardly indifferent and insincere. Their religion had become an empty formality, performed by a corrupt priesthood.

Malachi prophesied about fifty-five to sixty years after Zechariah, and the people had already backslidden from the revival, which had come through the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. They were now hardened and cold toward God's law. Malachi, as all the prophets had done, rebuked their sins and then promised the coming of Christ as the only remedy for their backsliding.

Malachi 1: The Impiety and Profanity of the Priests

God had chosen Jacob and his posterity for His people instead of Esau, because Esau had proven himself unworthy of the birthright by selling it. Yet, the descendants of Jacob were not ungrateful for having been chosen of the Lord (verses 1-5). They had failed to honor God as their Father and Master, or Lord, (verse 6). The priests no longer feared the Lord, but dishonored His name by offering polluted bread on His altar. By their very act, they admitted that the table of the Lord was contemptible to them. They offered sacrifices of the blind, lame, and sick animals, something they would not dare to do to their governor. Without a reward, they would refuse to open a door in the house of the Lord or to build a fire on His altar (verses 6-10). Nevertheless, they had denied every charge that Malachi had brought against them.

In verse 11, Malachi looked ahead to the time when the apostles of Christ would turn to the Gentiles with the gospel after the rulers of the Jews had rejected the Lord Jesus and His gospel (Acts 13:38-48). The priests of Malachi's time had profaned the service of the Lord by showing that it was pollute and contemptible to them. It was a weariness to them, and they observed these ceremonies of the Law of Moses insincerely, and only for show. The Lord said He would not accept their sacrifices but would send a curse upon them. They had dishonored Him by feigning to offer to Him, the Lord of hosts, their great King, that which they would not offer to their governor (verses 12-14).

Malachi 2: Sins of the Priests and People

In God's organization of the kingdom of Israel under the leadership of Moses, He had chosen and ordained the Levitical priesthood. His covenant with Levi had been of life and peace. His priests of former years had feared the Lord and taught His law of truth, whereby they had turned many away from iniquity. He said His priests should keep knowledge so the people could seek the law from them, for they were ordained to be the Lord's messengers. Yet, these priests had departed from His way, corrupted the covenant of Levi, and had caused many to stumble at God's holy law. Nehemiah had also rebuked the priests for these sins (Neh. 13:29, 30).

The Lord gave a commandment to Malachi for the priests: that if they refused to hear his prophet, and lay it to heart (become sincere in their service of the Lord), He would send a curse upon them. He would corrupt their seed (children), bringing sorrow and shame on them (verse 1-9). He then rebuked them for their treacherous dealing with one another (verse 10).

The Lord next gave Malachi a message of rebuke for the people of Judah and Israel because many had divorced the wives of their youth and married heathens. Nehemiah also had strongly rebuked them for this sin (Neh. 13:23-28, 30). The Lord said He would cut off any who did this, whether master or scholar (whether priest or lay-member). They would be cast out of the tabernacle (house) of Jacob (disowned). While observing the ceremonial law religious, they had broken God's moral law by intermarriage with heathens. God's law of racial separation for His people was very strict, lest they become contaminated with the idolatry and iniquity of the heathens. The people justified themselves in their evil ways and refused to believe that God would punish them (verses 11-17).

Malachi 3: The Promise of the Messiah

The Lord had promised the Messiah to every generation since the time of Adam. All Israel had looked forward to His coming to bring them into a place of Utopia. Malachi

now prophesied that the Lord was soon going to send His messenger to prepare the way before Him, and that: "...The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,..." (verse 1). Malachi, like all the prophets, could only promise Israel salvation by the coming of Messiah, but he revealed that the coming of Christ would not fulfill their expectations and hopes for national restoration and glory. His holy presence would rather condemn their unrighteousness and hypocrisy. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His clash with the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-33).

Malachi promised that Messiah would purify the faithful remnant of the Jews, but would punish the unrepentant sinners and hypocrites (verses 3-6). The offerings of the purified would be pleasant to the Lord, as had been the faith of His people in former years, but He would send judgment on the sinners, who oppressed the hireling, the widow, the fatherless, and who did not fear Him. He would not consume the sons of Jacob because he was the same merciful and compassionate God (Exo. 34:5-7) who never changes. He then reminded them of their long history of backslidings. He would still forgive them if they would return to Him, but if they continued to refuse, He could not clear the guilty (verse 7).

Malachi charged the people with robbing God (verses 8-18). When they again denied any guilt by saying, "...Wherein have we robbed thee? ..." he told them they had robbed God by failing to bring their tithes into the storehouse. Even though the whole nation had failed to pay their tithes, the Lord promised again to bless them with abundant prosperity if they would repent and obey His law. We have no record of their repentance in this matter. Then the Lord, through Malachi, brought another charge against them. They had spoken stout words against the Lord, and again denied that they had done so. They had said it was vain to serve God. They had reaped no profit by keeping His ordinance, or walking mournfully before Him. They said the proud were happy, and those who worked wickedness and tempted God had not been punished, but had prospered. The Lord answered that a book of remembrance was written before Him for all who feared Him, and thought upon His name and spoke often to one another of His goodness. They may not have seemed to be rewarded immediately, but they would be His own when He made up His jewels and would be spared in His judgment of the wicked. God's true saints know that they are favored of the Lord, but it will take the end time judgment to reveal to the world just how blessed and profitable it is to serve God and walk with Him in faith and holiness (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31-46) (verses 1-8).

Malachi 4: The Last Message

Malachi closed his prophecy, the last message God would speak to His people for the next four hundred years, with

a dire warning of coming judgment on the wicked (verse 1), and a glorious promise of hope for the faithful, with an admonition to be careful to obey the law of the Lord (verses 2-4).

God promised (verses 5, 6) that the final judgment would not come until the Lord had come to redeem His people from their inbred wickedness (Jer. 17:9; 31:31-34). He would first send someone to prepare the way for the Redeemer. He would come in the spirit of Elijah (Elias). See Luke 1:17; 3:1-17; John 1:19-23. John the Baptist was very successful in preparing the people of Israel to receive the Christ when He should come on the scene. Jesus testified of him (Luke 7:24-30). But only Jesus Christ (God manifested in the flesh) could die for our sins, arise from the dead, and ascend on high to give us His resurrection life on the day of Pentecost in the Holy Ghost. This is the new birth to a new heart and a new life in the Lord. He changes the heart feelings and desires of men and we should rejoice greatly for this wonderful salvation.