

Minor Prophets

Jet Witherspoon Toole



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FOREWORD

The author of this course of study on the Minor Prophets, Jet Witherspoon Toole, enriches us from a background of fifty-four years in the Pentecostal ministry. She spent over twenty of these years as a Bible college instructor of Bible-centered courses. This commentary on an oft-neglected portion of the Scriptures is the composite result of having taught this material repeatedly in the classroom and from the pulpit. The reader should take note of and will be impressed by the many scriptural cross-references supplied by the author. This is characteristic of her style and reveals the broad general knowledge of the Word of God from which she writes.

It was my distinct privilege to sit first as her student and then for a number of years to minister as her colleague in Bible college service. Exposure to the spoken and written precept coming from the ministry of a godly woman who lives what she teaches has enriched my life and ministry and that of hundreds of today's pastors and missionaries.

The contents of this book come from an alert mind as the author has written for us in these her golden years. She has obeyed Paul's injunction 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 Timothy 2:2). She has done what she could. Let us now receive it and "teach others also."

Edwin E. Judd, Th.B., B.A.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars call the twelve prophetic books of this study “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 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 books of Kings and Chronicles record the historical background of each prophet, which had a definite influence on his prophecy.

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 (Isaiah 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. Second Kings 14-16 and II Chronicles 26-32 is the historical background for his prophecy.

He directed his messages 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 (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). They had broken those vows and God's curses were now coming upon them (Deuteronomy 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 to call the first son 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 to name Lo-ruhamah (Unpitied) to indicate that He would no longer have mercy on the people of Israel. He extended mercy to Judah 136 years after the fall of Israel (verses 6-7). Assyria took Israel captive in 721 BC, and Nebuchadnezzar carried Judah into Babylon in 586 BC.

Gomer's third child, a son, was named Lo-ammi (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

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, led the ten tribes of Israel into idolatry 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; 15:8-9, 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 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 Achor. 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. God finally restored both Israel and Judah to their homeland, but God bought them back through Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who became their eternal King (I Corinthians 6:14-20; 7:23).

Hosea 4: The General Charges of Israel's Sins

Hosea enumerated the many sins of Israel: falsehood, lack of mercy, swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery, just to name a few. The unfaithfulness of Hosea's wife symbolized all of these. Only captivity in the land of wicked and cruel Assyria could cause them to realize 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 (Romans 10:1-3; II Peter 3:1-7).

God warned Judah against following in the footsteps of backsliding Israel. However, the people of Judah also forsook the Lord, following 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 net to the people within their borders by leading them in the 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 (verse 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 (Deuteronomy 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 (Jeremiah 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" (Jeremiah 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 (Ephesians 1:4-14). Jeremiah prophesied of this salvation in his pleading with Judah (Jeremiah 30:8-10; 31:31-34).

God told both Ephraim and Judah that He would give them into captivity and they would not return until 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 (Romans 6:4; 8:1; I Corinthians 6:14; II Corinthians 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 Corinthians 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. Nevertheless, 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 stronger 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. Hosea compared the fervency of their wickedness 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 event 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” (verse 17).

Hosea 10: Chastisement

Israel became prosperous during some periods of their history, especially during the reign of Jeroboam II. However, spiritually 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 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. They finally gave their golden calves 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 pleaded 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 (Romans 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. Verses 1-4 portray a very heart-warming picture. 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. In addition, 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 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—Genesis 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 (Genesis 32:24-30) and how he had found God at Bethel (Genesis 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 Chronicles 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 Israel's 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." The record of Hebrews 11:32-40 shows proof of the salvation of many. In Hebrews 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 their first king, Jeroboam I, led the people of the northern kingdom away from the worship of Jehovah, 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 (Deuteronomy 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. Psalm 126:1-4 record some of their words:

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 labour 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” (Matthew 11:28-30).

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

Self Help Test: Hosea, the Prophet of Love

Give brief answers

1. With which prophets was Hosea contemporary? To whom did he prophesy?

2. Why did God tell Hosea to marry a sinful woman?

3. Why is Jeroboam referred to as “Jeroboam who made Israel to sin”?

4. How was Hosea’s unfaithful wife an illustration of unfaithful Israel?

5. List seven of Israel’s sins.

- A.

- B.

- C.

- D.

- E.

- F.

- G.

6. What did God want more than burnt offerings?

7. Why was Israel scattered among the Gentiles?

8. Why did God continue to deal with Israel even after the nation went into captivity?

9. Why did Ephraim receive his death notice in Hosea 13?

10. How did Hosea close his prophecy?

Personal Study Notes

Chapter Two

JOEL, THE PROPHET OF PENTECOST

Introduction

There is little scriptural indication of the time of Joel's prophecy. Some scholars think he prophesied during the reign of Joash over Judah and was 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 11-12 and II Chronicles 23-24. The only personal information given of him is that he was the son of Pethuel, of whom we know nothing.

The occasion of his prophecy was an unusually severe invasion of insects that 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 anything like it in their days, nor had they heard of anything like it in the days of

their fathers. It would be something that they would tell 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 that would come as a mighty army and strip their land of all vegetation. Scholars believe that these insects were 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 would chastise the people of Judah for their sins and 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, and had committed the sins of idolatry. Now there would be nothing for meat and drink offerings. Their seed would rot under the clods, the garners 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 (Isaiah 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 symbolized 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 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). Then Eliakim, governor of the king's household, Joah, and Shebna 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 rumour, 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 19:8-19). 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 event 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 tarried in the upper room (Acts 2:1- 8, 37-39; Joel 2:32).

Joel 3: Message of Judgment on Israel’s Enemies

Joel 2:30-31 really belongs 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.

No valley in Palestine is 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 Chronicles 20:1-25.) This symbolized the place where He would destroy the nations that make 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 Thessalonians 2:3-8; Revelation 19:11-16), they will acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Philippians 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 Corinthians 12:12, 13), which is His church (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 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 (Romans 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 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 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 (Revelation 20:1-6) and the curse will be lifted off the earth (Genesis 3:14-19). Then the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). The prophet Isaiah has also given us a picture of the Millennium of Christ (Isaiah 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.

Self Help Test: Joel, the Prophet of Pentecost

True or False: Circle the correct answer.

1. Joel was the son of Pethuel, of whom we know nothing.
True or False
2. Joel prophesied of a great calamity that would come on the people of Judah.
True or False
3. The calamity that Joel prophesied would come was an earthquake.
True or False
4. Hezekiah sent the scribes and elders to Isaiah with an urgent request for prayer.
True or False

5. Hezekiah spread a threatening letter he had received before the Lord.
True or False

6. Joel gave a wonderful prophecy of Pentecost.
True or False

7. A valley in Palestine is called the Valley of Jehoshaphat.
True or False

8. Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament bear witness to a time when Israel as a nation will accept God in Jesus Christ.
True or False

9. Joel, Habakkuk, and Isaiah prophesied a future millennial reign of Christ.
True or False

Personal Study Notes

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; and II Chronicles 26:1-23. He was a native herdsman of Tekoa (in Judah), 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.

God called Amos 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 that took place during the reign of Uzziah (Zechariah 14:5). The principal place of his ministry was Bethel, the city that 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 that 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's 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; Jeremiah 12:14; 13:4-7).

God's punishment against Gaza of the Philistines, with whom Israel had much warfare, would be a fire that 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 that 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 (Ezekiel 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 (Ezekiel 25:12-13; 35:1-15), prophesied of Edom's violence against the people of Judah at the time of 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 Samuel 11:1-11). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied of God's judgments on them (Jeremiah 49:1-2; Ezekiel 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 (Genesis 19:33-38). The Moabites, 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 Chronicles 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, more of their kings worshiped idols than those who followed the Lord (I Kings 11:1-13). Idolatrous kings and the lies of false prophets led the people 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 Nazarites—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 the gods of the heathens around them. They could not walk with God while worshipping idols. Although He had chastised them 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 Chronicles 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 to punish 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 kine (cattle) because they oppressed the poor, with no more humane feeling than cattle, while they

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 to Jehovah by idolatrous practices before the altar at Bethel. They offered sacrifices of thanksgiving with the leaven (false doctrine) of idolatry (Matthew 16:6, 11-12). They hypocritically brought their tithes after three years and publicly proclaimed their free-will offerings (Matthew 6:1-4). Their false religion had made this kind of people of the children of Israel (verses 4-5).

In verse 6, the prophet was not referring 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 that had no rain were dried up (blasted) and those that 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 God's 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 that 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 (Jeremiah 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 that 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 to the Sea of the Plain. He recovered Damascus and 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 to 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 Hamath (Hamath) to the river of the wilderness, the river of Egypt on the South (verses 7-14).

Amos 7: Amos's 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 burning with fire. He 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 in spite of God's great mercy, justice must finally be executed. God gives people every possible opportunity to repent, but when they continue in sin until there is no remedy (Isaiah 28:17), His judgment must fall (verses 1-9).

The principal place of Amos's 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 until 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's 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 God's law, 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 (Ezekiel 7:26; Micah 3:6-7).

Amos 9: Amos's Fifth Vision

Amos's 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 2-3 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 (Romans 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's 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 (Ephesians 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.

Self Help Test: Amos, the Prophet of Justice

Give brief answers.

1. Amos's call was dated two years before what event that occurred during the reign of which king?

2. To whom was Amos called to prophesy and for which other nation did he had a message?

3. Why was God often said to roar His message to the people?

4. With what phrase did Amos begin each message? What did this signify?

5. What became the major subject of Amos's prophecies?

6. How were the ten tribes affected by the ministries of Elijah and Elisha?

7. What was doubtlessly Israel's greatest sin?

8. For what did Amos reprove Israel?

9. What was the reason for Amos's deep sorrow?

10. What conditions prevailed during the time Amos prophesied?

11. What vision made Amos an intercessor for the people of Israel?

12. What did the false prophets insinuate regarding Amos?

13. How did Amos respond to Amaziah's opposition?

14. What did God show Amos through the vision of a basket of summer fruit?

15. Amos's final prophecy looked ahead to what future event?

Personal Study Notes

Chapter Four

OBADIAH, THE PROPHET OF EDOM

Introduction

No scriptural proof indicates when Obadiah prophesied. However, since his prophecy is very similar to Jeremiah's concerning Edom (Jeremiah 49:7-22), it is possible—and also probable—that he prophesied sometime 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 1: Chastisement and Destruction of Edom

The first verse of Obadiah's prophecy is almost identical with that of Jeremiah 49:14-15. He said God would stir up the heathen nations against the Edomites to punish them for their sins against Judah. In comparison with the other nations, God had made Edom "small," perhaps in respect and recognition

as well as in numbers. Edom was “greatly despised” among men. 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; Jeremiah 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 crossroads 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 had said He would bring them down (verse 4).

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 AD 70 by the Roman general Titus, they disappeared from history, fulfilling this prophecy.

The last of Obadiah's prophecy looks ahead to the complete spiritual restoration of Israel and of Christ's reign on earth for a thousand years. Other passages of Scripture that foretold the doom of Edom are Psalm 137:1-7; Isaiah 34:5-15; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Amos 1:11-12.

Self Help Test: Obadiah, the Prophet of Edom

True or False: Circle the correct answer.

1. The Edomites were descendants of Esau.
True or False
2. The Edomites had a great love for the Israelites.
True or False
3. Obadiah prophesied that God would stir up the heathen nations against the Edomites because of their sins against Judah.
True or False
4. The Edomites rejoiced over Judah's downfall.
True or False
5. Obadiah promised Edom's complete extinction because of her sins.
True or False

6. The last of Obadiah's prophecy looks ahead to the complete spiritual restoration of Israel and Christ's reign on earth.

True or False

Chapter Five

JONAH, THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

Introduction

Jonah was a Galilean from the town of Gath-hepher near Nazareth. Scholars think he 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 14:23-25.) Jesus confirmed the fact of Jonah's historical character and the story of him being swallowed by a whale (Matthew 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 sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30).

Second Kings 14 records the historical background of Jonah's prophecy. He had a message for Israel, but the prophecy and history recorded in the Book of Jonah concern 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. Scholars have identified Tarshish as Tartessus in Spain, about as far in the opposite direction from Nineveh as possible. Jonah soon learned, 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 break 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 the offender was 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 seaweed 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 (Ephesians 4:9-10; I Peter 3:18-22).

Jonah 3: Jonah's Second Commission and Revival

God still required Jonah to go to Nineveh. God's gifts and callings are without repentance (Romans 11:29). God cannot change His mind, 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.

The great city of Nineveh included four cities surrounded by a great wall, forming a diamond-shaped area that was a three days' journey across. The interior of the area seems to have been farm and pasture land.

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 fast 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 of 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). By this, God 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 men of war (verses 9-11).

Self Help Test: Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet

Give brief answers.

1. Where did Jesus confirm the fact of Jonah's historical character and his being swallowed by a whale?

2. Where is the historical background of Jonah's prophecy recorded?

3. To what extent was Jonah's experience a type of Jesus?

4. To what extent does God repent?

5. How did Jonah reveal he did not come to Nineveh with a true missionary spirit?

6. What was God demonstrating to Jonah in the gourd vine that grew up quickly and then was cut down rapidly?

Personal Study Notes

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. Second Chronicles 26-33 and II Kings 15-17 contain the historical background of his prophecy. He was a native of Judah, and he prophesied to both Judah and Israel. However, his prophecies mostly concerned Israel.

A marked resemblance exists between his prophecy and Isaiah's. Compare Micah 4:1-5 with Isaiah 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 (Jeremiah 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 everything 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 overrun, their homes swept away from them, and their images destroyed (verses 2-7).

Micah pictured 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. The idolatry of Israel had also contaminated Judah (Jeremiah 3:6-10). Micah told the people of Israel of the very great sorrow and mourning they would be plunged into when God poured His wrath 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 (Galatians 5:16-21; II Timothy 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 anything they desired to do (Matthew 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; Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21-2). 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).

The rulers of Israel hated and dishonored God's true prophets, 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, a righteous remnant still remained 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 that could lead only to destruction. Their only concern for the people was to make merchandise of them. They cried peace, but if the people would 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. Isaiah 26:9 states, "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 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22). God's temple, which is His spiritual kingdom (Romans 14:17; Colossians 1:13-14), will never be destroyed (Daniel 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 were cut off as a nation until they should accept Christ as their Lord and Savior (Romans 11:1-6, 13-27).

This message of Micah (verses 1-8) looked away to the time of Christ's millennial reign on earth (Revelation 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 (Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:17-25).

It appears from Scripture that the glorified saints of God (the bride of Christ) will reign with Him during the one thousand years (Matthew 19:27-29). They will be caught up at the coming of Christ to catch away His church (I Corinthians 15:50-57; Revelation 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 (Zechariah 14:1-9; Revelation 19:11-21; 20:1-10). After their miraculous deliverance at Armageddon, Israel will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Ezekiel 38:14-23; 39:17-29; Revelation 19:17-21; Isaiah 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 (Isaiah 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 shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon 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 (Matthew 26:67; 27:30).

Judah would be smitten and carried to Babylon within about 135 or 140 years from the time of Micah's prophecy. Nevertheless, 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; Matthew 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 (Hebrews 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 (Isaiah 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 (Daniel 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, many were 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 the 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. No good men seemed to be 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 receiving 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 (Matthew 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, a remnant of faith among the people always remained. 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 (Galatians 3:16).

Self Help Test: Micah, the Prophet of the Oppressed

Give brief answers.

1. With whom was Micah contemporary?

2. With what other prophecy is there marked resemblance to Micah?

3. What good result came from Hezekiah's respect for Micah's prophecy?

4. What inspired Micah's first message?

5. What sins of Judah and Israel did Micah point out?

6. What message of hope did Micah give to both Israel and Judah?

7. Which prophecy of Micah's stands out as unique among the prophets?

8. What requirements of the Lord did Micah reveal?

9. Why did Micah feel so forlorn?

10. Why could Micah feel encouraged and optimistic?

Chapter Seven

NAHUM, THE PROPHET OF ASSYRIA

Introduction

Nahum probably began prophesying during the reign of Hezekiah over Judah, probably a little after the captivity of Israel by Assyria. He certainly prophesied 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 in II Kings 18-20 and II Chronicles 29-32.

The subject of his entire prophecy was 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 (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 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 refers to Assyria's cruelty. Nahum pictured Assyria as a lion tearing its prey into pieces. Its kings reportedly enacted vicious atrocities and mutilations against their prisoners.

Verse 2 refers to God's permitting Assyria to empty (carry away) and mar His vine (Israel). Verses 3-13 describe the destruction of Nineveh by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It is said that five walls and three moats (canals) between the walls protected Nineveh. 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, during which

time 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 because the Assyrian kings and their armies had been so 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).

Self Help Test: Nahum, the Prophet of Assyria

True or False: Circle the correct answer.

1. Nahum was a native of Elkosh.
True or False
2. The subject of Nahum's entire prophecy is the restoration of Nineveh.
True or False
3. The purpose of Nahum's prophecy was to assure the Jews that God would protect them from the threat of an Assyrian attack.
True or False
4. Nahum pictured God as one quick to become angry.
True or False
5. Nahum pictured Assyria as a lion tearing its prey into pieces.
True or False
6. The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that for many centuries its ancient location was unknown.
True or False
7. When God laid His hand of judgment on Nineveh, her strong men became weak as women and all her defenses collapsed.
True or False

Chapter Eight

HABAKKUK, THE PROPHET OF COMPLAINT AND FAITH

Introduction

The Scriptures tell 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 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 23-25 and II Chronicles 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 (Jeremiah 23:9-14; Ezekiel 8:1-18). Habakkuk asked how long he should cry against the iniquity and violence of the people that 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. Habakkuk 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 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 over 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 reprovved 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 later He would 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 would 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 they had 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.

Self Help Test: Habakkuk, the Prophet of Complaint and Faith

Give brief answers.

1. What can be learned about Habakkuk from his writings?

2. What caused the conflict of faith that Habakkuk expressed?

3. What caused an even greater conflict of faith?

4. How did the Lord answer Habakkuk's honest conflict of faith?

5. Why did Habakkuk burst out in a prayer of praise to God?

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 in II Kings 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-35.

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. Some had deliberately turned from worshiping the Lord, and still others 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 bloodshed and death at the taking of Jerusalem. At this time the armies of Nebuchadnezzar would execute God's punishment of Judah's princes, king, and the king's children. His punishment would also fall on all who were in strange clothing (all who worshiped 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 everything. 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 do neither good nor 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 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 desolate. We have just studied Nahum's prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh by the Babylonians, whom Nebuchadnezzar led. The Babylonians were moving against many nations about this time, with the goal of ruling the world. 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 until tomorrow. Her prophets were treacherous and her priests polluted the sanctuary, doing violence to the law of God. God continued to warn Judah through His prophets and to punish their enemies, hoping they would repent so He would not have to destroy them. However, they continued to corrupt themselves until there was no remedy (verses 1-7). (See II Chronicles 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 (Isaiah 46:9-10) gave him His message of hope for the world. He looked away to the time of the end when all the 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 (Zechariah 12:1-10; 14:1-9; Revelation 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 (Isaiah 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 (Genesis 11:1-9). This has been the result of all evil works from the beginning (Daniel 2:40-45). Yet when men accept God's truth and His way, they will find 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 (Ephesians 1:12-14; 4:30). Their sins will be taken away when they receive the gift of righteousness in the Holy Ghost (Romans 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 speak 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 Millennium as prophesied of by several of the prophets. Our finite minds cannot imagine the glories awaiting all God's saints who are faithful to the end (Romans 8:18; II Timothy 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).

Self Help Test: Zephaniah, the Orator

Give brief answers.

1. With whom was Zephaniah contemporary?

2. With what were Zephaniah's prophecies mostly concerned?

3. How did Zephaniah indicate the imminence of Judah's captivity?

4. Why did Zephaniah plead with the people to gather and seek the Lord?

5. How did Zephaniah describe the level of sin to which Judah had fallen?

6. What message of hope was found in Zephaniah's prophecies?

7. What do these prophecies show about Israel as a nation?

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 in Ezra 5-6.

God commissioned Haggai 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 BC. 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, until the reign of Darius over Persia, the Temple 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 cieled 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 (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

(Ephesians 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 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 all the nations. This referred to the first coming of Christ to earth to die for the sins of all the 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 be 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 ceremonially unclean 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.) By this example, Haggai taught the people 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 to Israel (Acts 1:6-8). Zerubbabel was here named as a type of Christ (Zechariah 4:5-10; Isaiah 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 (Hebrews 12:2), who was going to build His spiritual temple.

Self Help Test: Haggai, the Prophet of Temple Building

Give brief answers.

1. Why are Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi called post-exilic prophets?

2. What was Haggai's commission?

3. What reasons did Haggai give the Jews for their lack of prosperity?

4. What inspired the Jews to resume building the house of the Lord?

5. What was the purpose of Haggai's second message?

6. What was the content of Haggai's last message?

Personal Study Notes

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 5-6). 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 (I 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 (Zechariah 1:1; Haggai 1:1). He warned the people against ignoring the word of God given by the prophets as their forefathers had done before the Captivity (verses 2-6). Their forefathers had afterward confessed that their disobedience had brought them into captivity (verse 6).

Vision 1: The Man among the Myrtle Tree (1:7-17)

Meaning: God's anger against the nations and blessing on restored Israel.

Zechariah received most of his messages from the Lord in visions. His first vision was of riders on horses among the myrtle trees. The rider of the red horse was called the angel of the Lord. The red 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-year period of Judah's captivity in Babylon. The angel asked the Lord how long He would 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).

Vision 2: Four Horns and the Four Craftsmen (1:18-21)

Meaning: God's judgment on the nations that afflict Israel

The four horns of Zechariah's second vision (verses 18-19) symbolize the nations that had scattered the people of Israel from their homeland. Perhaps these were the four world kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:37-45), the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires. Horns in prophecy symbolize the power of kings and kingdoms (Daniel 8:3-4, 20; Revelation 17:12). The Lord's power in bringing salvation to His people is also symbolized by horns (II Samuel 22:3; Habakkuk 3:3-4; Luke 1:69; Revelation 5:6). Then the Lord showed him four carpenters (verses 20-21), which He explained were the horns (powers) 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

Vision 3: The Man with a Measuring Line (2:1-13)

Meaning: God future blessing on restored Israel

The third vision was of 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 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 that 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

Vision 4: The Cleansing and Crowning of Joshua, the High Priest (3:1-10)

Meaning: Israel's future cleansing from sin and reinstatement as a priestly nation

The fourth vision was of Joshua, the high priest, clothed in filthy garments, standing before the angel of the Lord 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 men in Christ. Joshua as high priest typified Christ. The filthy garments were a type of Christ taking our sins on Himself to pay our penalty of death that we might have life in Him (II Corinthians 5:21). The Lord rebuked (defeated) Satan's attempt to destroy Christ (Matthew 2:1-16; Revelation 12:3-10). The fair mitre placed on the head of Joshua typified the helmet of salvation that Christ would procure for men (Isaiah 59:17; Ephesians 6:17). He takes away our filthy garments of sin and clothes us with the robe of His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 3:5, 18; 7:9; 19:7-8).

God confirmed that this vision was symbolic of "things to come" for Israel when Messiah would come by picturing Christ as the BRANCH (the Son of David) (verses 8-9). Isaiah also pictured the Christ as the BRANCH (Isaiah 4:2-5; 11:1-4). He is that Rock on which the church was founded (Matthew 16:15-18; I Corinthians 10:4; Isaiah 32:2). The seven eyes upon the Stone before Joshua symbolized the omniscience of Christ (Zechariah 4:10; Revelation 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

Vision 5: The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (4:1-14)

Meaning: Israel as the light to the nations under Messiah, the King-Priest

Zechariah's fifth vision was of the golden lampstand (candlestick) with its seven lamps that 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 that had stood in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, which was to be kept always burning (Exodus 27:20-21), was a type of the New Testament church (Revelation 1:12-20). The church is God's light and His witness to the world (Matthew 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—Isaiah 28:17) in the hands of Zerubbabel and the seven eyes of the Lord, who sees everyone and every situation in the whole world (II Chronicles 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 all the world for a witness to all nations (Matthew 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 Corinthians 2:1-5; I Peter 4:10-11).

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

Vision 6: The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)

Meaning: The severity and totality of divine judgment on sin in Israel

Zechariah's sixth 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 (Exodus 19:1-17). Paul called the penalty of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23), the curse of the Law (Galatians 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" (Matthew 5:34-36).

Vision 7: The Woman in a Basket (5:5-11)

Meaning: The removal of Israel's national sin or rebellion against God

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 seventh 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 that had led them into such wickedness. They could only be cleansed through redemption in Christ.

Zechariah 6: Vision of the Four Chariots

Vision 8: Four Chariots (6:1-8)

Meaning: Divine judgment on Gentile nations

Zechariah's eighth vision was of four chariots drawn by red, black, white, and grised and bay horses. Verse 5 identifies these as representing God's ministering angels (Luke 1:19; Hebrews 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 Revelation 6:2-8, the white horse symbolizes the Lord going forth conquering and to conquer; the red horse represents war; the black horse represents famine; and the pale (bay and grised) horses represents death (the wages of sin) by many and varied means. The wicked must die the second death (Revelation 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 Jews 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 is prophetic of the double office of king and high priest that Jesus is to occupy in His spiritual kingdom (Hebrews 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 (Ephesians 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 fastings 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 house of the Lord, but now that they were again building the Temple, He promised to bless and prosper them. However, the promises of verses 1-8 reach 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. The Lord hated these things.

The Lord told them that the fasts of memorial and mourning 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; Romans 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 BC and reigned over it until 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 (Matthew 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 wrest 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 He would speak peace to the heathens. 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, Jeremiah 16:19-21), and 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 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 Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Titus 2:14; 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 AD 70 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. In verses 1-6, he seems to describe 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 their

leaders exploited them. Jesus said of them that they were as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:35-36). Jesus also confirmed the fulfillment of this prophecy (Matthew 23:1-15).

These leaders of the Jews (priests, elders, and members of the Sanhedrin) opposed Jesus during His 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 (Hebrews 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 (Hebrews 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 potter's field (verses 7-13; Matthew 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 who believed in and followed Jesus became His body, the church (Ephesians 5:19-23).

Verses 15-17 describe 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 (Ezekiel 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 (Matthew 23:23-36).

Zechariah 12: Deliverance by the Messiah

Verses 1-14 of this chapter are 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 (Zechariah 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 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 (Isaiah 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 (Ephesians 1:13-14; Revelation 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 (verses 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 (Revelation 19:7-9), after which His glorified saints will return with Him when He comes to fight the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 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 Isaiah 11:1-9.

Self Help Test: Zechariah, the Prophet of Inspiration and Hope

True or False: Circle the correct answer.

1. Zechariah's prophecies were concerned more with the coming of Messiah to build a spiritual temple.
True or False

2. The apostle Peter gave a splendid view of the inspiration and ministry of Old Testament prophets.
True or False

3. Zechariah received most of his messages from the Lord through other prophets.
True or False

4. Zechariah recorded a conversation between the angel of the Lord and the Lord.
True or False

5. In Zechariah's vision, the man with a measuring line told Zechariah that the Lord would be as a wall of fire around Jerusalem.
True or False

6. Zechariah's fourth vision was of Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed in the garments of righteousness.
True or False

7. God let Zechariah know that he would not build the Temple by his might or power but by the Spirit of the Lord.
True or False

8. Zechariah's eighth vision was of a flying saucer.
True or False

9. The Lord told Zechariah to assign the Jews to make two crowns of silver and gold and set them on the head of Joshua.

True or False

10. Zechariah warned the Jews against reverting to the practices of their fathers before captivity.

True or False

11. In Zechariah 8, Zechariah told the Jews that the fasting and mourning they observed in captivity should now become feasts of joy and gladness.

True or False

12. Zechariah prophesied of Christ's riding into Jerusalem on an ass.

True or False

13. Israel will never become conscious of the wounds Christ suffered, the blood He shed, or the price He paid for salvation.

True or False

14. The glorified saints of the Lord will return with Christ when He comes to fight the Battle of Armageddon.

True or False

15. The evil forces arrayed against Christ will never be completely destroyed.

True or False

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 as 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 that 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 grateful 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 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 polluted 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 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 (Nehemiah 13:29-30).

The Lord gave a commandment to Malachi for the priests: if they refused to hear His prophet and take 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 (verses 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 (Nehemiah 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 religiously, 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 (Matthew 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, and 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 (Exodus 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 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 (Matthew 24:27-31; 25:31-46) (Verses 8-18).

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) the final judgment would not come until the Lord had come to redeem His people from their inbred wickedness (Jeremiah 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 in the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. 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.

Self Help Test: Malachi, the Prophet of Rebuke

Give brief answers.

1. What is the last book of Old Testament history?

2. What is the last book of Old Testament prophecy?

3. How did Malachi picture the people of Israel as to their religion?

4. What were the sins of the priests?

5. Why did Malachi repeat a message of rebuke to the people of Judah and Israel?

6. What was the twofold content of Malachi's last message?

Missionary Spotlight: Fred and Vida Scott

By Kathy Scott Crossley

Fred and Vida Scott became missionaries to Uruguay in 1967. At the time, they were the oldest couple to be appointed by the Foreign Missions Division, United Pentecostal Church International. They became a catalyst for others to ask for missionary appointment in following years.

Fred and Vida were born as the fires of Pentecost swept across North America. Fred Scott was born in Calgary, Alberta, on October 30, 1915. Harvey McAlister took the message of Apostolic Pentecost to Canada where the Scott family received the Holy Ghost and were baptized in Jesus' name. Fred was eight years old when he also received the Holy Ghost. Four years later the Scotts immigrated to the United States and settled in Salem, Oregon.

God orchestrates times and seasons. At the same time, a little redheaded girl's family was also introduced to Pentecost and Oneness in Idaho. Vida Marie Smith was born on April 8, 1917, to the Joseph Smith family. They were strong Methodists, and later Joe Smith became a minister of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ. They too moved to Salem, and there Fred and Vida met for the first time at the ages of ten and twelve.

It would be a few years, but on August 17, 1935, they married and a commitment was made that spanned seventy years of marriage and sixty-five



years of ministry. Five children were born to this couple: Kenneth, Patricia, Jerry, Kathy, and Tim.

As a young couple, they were active in the church in Salem until they left for Apostolic Bible Institute in 1940. In those years churches were few and far between in the North Central District. Brother S. G. Norris sent Fred and Vida to pastor the church in Cochrane, Wisconsin, after one year of Bible school. He became an ordained minister of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ in July 1941. They pastored this congregation two different times. It was here that they first met the Urshan family. Nathaniel Urshan's grandmother was a saint in the Cochrane church.

One morning in prayer, God spoke to Fred Scott in an audible voice: "Glisan Street, Portland, Oregon." They moved back to Oregon to found the first church in that city. Evangelists Ruby Keyes (Klemin) and Jane Moyer (Hills) preached a revival and decided to stay. Sister Keyes became his youth leader.

After some years of pastoring God again moved them back to Wisconsin. They pastored four congregations in Wisconsin: Cochrane, LaCrosse, Marshfield, and Clintonville. Fred Scott served as youth president of the North Central District. He was present on the historical occasion of the formation of the United Pentecostal Church. Brother Scott's ministry seemed to be one of taking broken, divided churches, mending them, and when they were healed and whole, God would call him to another pastorate.

In 1957 the Scotts moved back to Oregon to pastor the church in Salem, Oregon. The Scotts also pastored in North Bend and Cottage Grove, Oregon. He served in different capacities in the Northwest and Oregon Districts. He served as



presbyter, and before his death served as district Foreign Missions director for eighteen years.

While pastoring in Salem, Brother Scott received his call to missions, but it wouldn't be until 1967 that the call could begin to be fulfilled. In his vision, he saw South America and a spotlight focused and shining on Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

Missionaries Fred and Vida Scott arrived in Uruguay in February of 1968, accompanied by their two youngest children, Kathy (17) and Tim (13). They faced multiple challenges including no knowledge of Spanish and a small work inundated by immorality and an element of witchcraft. In many services, the doors of the church had to be locked to protect the people. Prayer and fasting ensued and broke the back of these influences and revival and renewing began to spread.

Always looking beyond at the harvest field, Brother Scott felt the need to open the work in Paraguay. Independent missionaries Donald and Donna Bryant

had just arrived in Paraguay and were just beginning to hold Bible studies. (In time Brother Scott convinced the Bryants to become part of the UPCI). So at the end of their furlough the Scotts moved to Paraguay to establish the first United Pentecostal Church there in 1972.



Brother Scott served as superintendent of both Uruguay and Paraguay during this time. They purchased property and built the first UPC church in Paraguay, carving it out of the jungle. They began evangelizing this new field, making trips on ferries and small boats to remote areas searching for open doors. On the property purchased by Brother Scott now stands a strong church, a Bible school, and New Heights School, The Fred Scott Memorial School, where young people and children are being trained.

Due to ongoing health problems, Fred Scott decided to resign from missions. In 1976 they returned to the US thinking their life in missions was over. It is hard to knock a tough man down, and in a few short weeks Brother Scott was well. However, they still felt the door for South America was shut to them.

After pastoring in Cottage Grove, Oregon, for a short time they received a call asking if they would be willing to be furlough replacements for Central America. Without hesitation, they said yes; so at the age of sixty-three they were off again! They served in the countries of Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador.



The Scotts, in their remaining years, assisted in ministry in both Hood River and Gresham, Oregon. They remained active in ministry, always presenting themselves with new challenges: preaching revivals, dog-sledding in the Yukon, praying, making pizzas, cutting the grass . . . ministry was never relegated to just a pulpit. Fred Scott began painting at the age of seventy-eight. He painted over 200 paintings, and his artwork graces many homes today. Fred Scott gave his all and God called him home on March 30, 2006, at the age of ninety.

Vida's character is wrapped up in these few words: faithfulness, persistence, trustworthiness, discipline, and a deep love for God and family. She was promoted to glory on May 22, 2009.