

Introductory Notes to the Minor Prophets

The “minor prophets” are not minor in the sense of being less important than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel. Their messages are very important in God’s program of prophecy. The Hebrew Bible puts all twelve of these books together and simply calls them “the Twelve.” Bible students call them “minor prophets” mainly because of the brevity of their writings, although Zechariah is by no means a brief-or simple-book.

In each of these books, you will usually find a three-fold lesson: (1) Historical-each of the prophets preached and wrote to meet an immediate need in the lives of the people; (2) Prophetic- each prophet illustrates or announces something about Israel’s future, in judgment or in restoration; (3) Practical-the sins of the nations in that day are with us today, and there are many practical lessons for us to learn from these books. For example, in Hosea we see the backsliding of Israel, her chastening under Assyria, and her future cleansing and restoration. We also see in this book a lesson for believers today who disobey the Lord and commit “spiritual adultery” by following the world.

Here is a simple chronology of the minor prophets (and some of the major prophets) to help you keep them in their proper places historically.

Northern Kingdom	Southern Kingdom
Jonah—780–750	Joel—835–795
	Amos—765–750
Isaiah—750–680	
	Hosea—755–715
Micah—740–690	
<i>Taken by Assyria—721</i>	
	Nahum—630–610
	Zephaniah—625–610
	Jeremiah—626–586
	Habakkuk—625–586
	Obadiah—586
	Taken by Babylon—586
	Daniel—606–534
	Ezekiel—593–571

	<i>Return from Exile—536</i>
	Haggai—520–516
	Zechariah—520–500
	Malachi—450–400

(Note: Historians do not always agree on exact dates. This chart is designed to show the approximate relationships of the prophets to each other.)

Hosea

The name Hosea means “salvation.” He preached in the Northern Kingdom (Israel, also called “Ephraim”) during a period of national decline. When Hosea started his ministry, Jeroboam II was king, and it was a time of great prosperity. But the nation was rotting away inwardly and getting involved with foreign alliances instead of trusting God to lead and protect them. Hosea lived to see Israel taken captive by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. Read 2 Kings 15–17 for some of the historical background.

Hosea’s message is to the nation of Israel, exposing their sins and warning them of coming judgment. There is also a message of hope for the future, as we shall see. But the unique thing about his message is that he had to live it himself before he could preach it to the people. The prophet had to experience deep agony in his own marriage because of the sins of his wife, but all of this was a divinely sent object lesson to him and his people.

I. Israel’s Unfaithfulness Pictured (1–3)

Hosea wanted to marry a woman named Gomer, and God permitted him to do so, but warned him that she would break his heart. God’s warning came true: Gomer bore Hosea three children, then left him to live with other men. Imagine how Hosea’s heart was broken over her sin. Then God commanded the prophet to go find his wayward wife, and he discovered her-being sold in the slave market! (3:1–2) He had to buy his own wife back, bring her home, and assure her of his forgiveness and love. We have every reason to believe that Gomer repented of her sins and became a faithful wife.

All of this pictured Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord. The nation was married to the Lord (Ex. 34:14–16; Deut. 32:16; Isa. 62:5; Jer. 3:14) and should have remained faithful to Him. But Israel lusted after sin, especially the false gods of other nations, and she committed “spiritual adultery” by forsaking the true God and worshipping the idols of her enemies. They promised her many pleasures, but she discovered there was pain and sorrow as well. Like Gomer, Israel would go into slavery (captivity) because of her sins. But that is not the end of the story. Just as Hosea sought out his wife and bought her

back, so the Lord would seek out His people, set them free, and restore them to His love and blessing.

You can trace the history of Israel in the names of the three children: (1) Jezreel (1:4) means "scattered," referring to the time when God would scatter Israel among the nations; (2) Lo-ruhamah (1:6) means "unpitied," meaning that God would lift His mercy from the nation and permit her to suffer for her sins; (3) Lo-ammi (1:9) means "not my people," indicating this present time in God's program when Israel is out of fellowship with God and its people are not His people as once they were. (In 2:1, we see there will be a time when God will call Israel "My people" and "Obtaining pity," when Christ returns and restores the nation and establishes His righteous kingdom.) In 3:3–5 we have a summary of Israel's spiritual condition.

We cannot leave these chapters without pointing out that spiritual adultery can be a sin of NT Christians as well as the OT Jew (1 John 2:15–17; Rev. 2:1–7; James 4:1–10). Christians who love the world and live for sin are false to their Savior and break His heart. Paul warned the Corinthians against this (2 Cor. 11:1–3).

II. Israel's Sins Proclaimed (4–7)

No doubt all the neighbors talked about Gomer's sins and pointed an accusing finger at her. But now Hosea points a finger at them and reveals their sins. His message reads like today's newspaper; read 4:1–2 especially. Swearing, lying, drunkenness, murder, treachery, adultery, idolatry—these sins and many more were rampant in the nation. And to make matters worse, the nation tried to cover her sins with a shallow "religious revival" (6:1–6). Hosea is a master preacher; see how he pictures the spiritual condition of the people: (1) a morning cloud (6:4), here one minute, gone the next; (2) a half baked cake (7:8), for their religion had not gotten deep into their lives, but was a surface thing; (3) gray hairs (7:9), losing their strength but ignorant of the change; (4) a silly dove (7:11), unstable, flitting from one political ally to another; (5) a deceitful bow (7:16) that you cannot depend on.

III. Israel's Judgment Pronounced (8–10)

The backslider is always punished (Prov. 14:14), and that is what Israel was—a backslider (4:16; see also Jer. 3:6, 11). Christians who break their vows with the Lord do not lose their salvation, of course, but they do lose their joy, power, and usefulness; and they must suffer the discipline of God. Hosea could see Assyria coming to punish the nation and deliver it into slavery. He pictures this judgment as the coming of a swift eagle (8:1), the wrath of a whirlwind (8:7), and the burning of a fire (8:14). The nation is going to be scattered (8:8; 9:17), and they will reap more than they have sown (10:12–15). Sinners reap what they have sown, of course (Gal. 6:7–8); but they also reap more, because those few seeds planted multiply into a large harvest. How terrible it is to reap the harvest of sin! David sowed one seed of lust and see what a harvest of tears he reaped.

Why did God permit Israel to be judged by wicked Assyria? Because He loved His people. Love always disciplines to make the child better (Heb. 12:1–13; Prov. 3:11–12). The hand of chastening is the hand of love; it is the Father correcting a son, not a judge

punishing a criminal. How grateful we ought to be for the chastening love of God-Ps. 119:71.

IV. Israel's Restoration Promised (11–14)

Hosea does not end on a gloomy note. He sees the future glory of the nation. Just as his wife was brought back from slavery and restored to his home and heart, so the nation would one day be restored to her land and to her Lord. These closing chapters magnify the faithful love of God in contrast to the unfaithfulness of His people.

God loved Israel in Egypt (11:1), when she was a captive nation having no beauty or glory. It was His grace that redeemed her from slavery, that led her, that provided for her every need. But from the very beginning of this “marriage” between Jehovah and Israel, the people were “bent on backsliding” (11:7). God drew them with cords of love (11:4), but they tried to break those cords and go their own way. Sin is not only the breaking of God's law; it is the breaking of God's heart. Read 11:8–11 to see the yearning heart of God as He seeks to bring His unfaithful people back to the place of blessing. In chapter 12 we see the nation “talking big” and boasting of her wealth and achievements; yet God says, “They are feeding on wind—it's all hot air.” The backslidden person may enjoy material wealth and physical pleasures, but this will never satisfy the heart or glorify the Lord; and in the end the backslider will be poor, wretched, blind, and naked.

Chapter 14 is God's loving appeal to His “wife” to return to His heart and blessing. He asks for sacrifices from their lips—words of confession—and not the sacrifices of animals. He promises to heal their backslidings (14:4) and restore them to His favor. He pictures the nation as a fruitful tree or vine (vv. 4–7) once the nation has turned from her idols and returned to the Lord. Of course, this will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to establish His kingdom and fulfill the promises made to the fathers.

But please do not miss the personal message here: backsliders may return to the Lord, experience His forgiveness (1 John 1:9), and be restored to the place of blessing and usefulness. The closing verses present two ways: the way of the Lord, which is right, and the way of transgressors, which is wrong. Claim v. 4 for yourself and experience the healing of sins forgiven.

Joel

Hosea's message grew out of a personal heartbreak in his own family; Joel's message grew out of a national calamity: the invasion of a plague of locusts. Along with the locusts came a terrible drought (1:19–20), and the combination of the two brought the land to the place of famine. Joel had a message for the people of Judah, for he saw in these calamities the disciplining hand of God for their sins. But he looked beyond the locusts and saw another “army”—a literal army of Gentile nations attacking Jerusalem (3:2). In other words, Joel used the immediate judgment of God (the locusts) as an illustration of the ultimate judgment, “the day of the Lord.” So, Joel's book is divided into

two parts: (1) the present message about the plague of locusts, 1:1–2:27; and (2) the future message about the day of the Lord, 2:28–3:21.

Before looking at these two messages, we must understand what Joel means by “the day of the Lord.” He uses the phrase five times, in 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; and 3:14. Other prophets also use it (Isa. 2:12; 13:6–9; 14:3; Jer. 30:7–8; 46:10; and the entire Book of Zephaniah). The phrase “the day of the Lord” refers to that future time when God will pour out His wrath on the Gentile nations *because of their sins against the Jews* (see Joel 3:1–8). It will occur after the church has been taken to heaven (see 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9–10, and Rev. 3:10), during that period of seven years known as the Tribulation. It is described most fully in Rev. 6–19. This period will end with the Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9–17; Rev. 19:11–21) and Jesus Christ returning to the earth to establish His kingdom.

I. The Day of the Lord Typified (1:1–2:27)

A. Proclamation (1:1–20).

Joel addresses several different groups of people as he describes the terrible plague and its devastating results. The old men (vv. 1–4) are asked if they can remember such a tragedy from the years gone by. No, they cannot. In fact, they will tell their children and even their great-grandchildren about the awful event. In v. 4 we do not have four different insects; rather, we have the locust in four different stages of growth. There are some ninety varieties of locusts, and all of them are well able to ruin a nation. Joel next turns to the drunkards (vv. 5–7) who weep and howl because the vineyards have been ruined and their supply of drink is gone. He then turns to the worshipers (vv. 8–10) who must go to the temple empty-handed because there are no sacrifices to bring. He addresses the farmers (vv. 11–12) who are howling because their crops are all ruined. Finally, Joel turns to the priests (vv. 13–14) and tells them to fast and pray. Here we reach the heart of the matter, for it was because of sin that God was punishing the nation. So long as the people obeyed Him, He would send the rain and the harvest; but if they turned away from Him, He would make the heavens like brass and destroy their fields. See Deut. 11:10–17; 2 Chron. 7:13–14.

B. Tribulation (2:1–11).

Joel blows the trumpet of alarm to warn the people that the destroying army of locusts is coming. Locusts do resemble tiny horsemen, and their ability to eat everything in their path has often been proved. Verse 10 suggests such great swarms that they will blot out the sun and moon.

C. Humiliation (2:12–17).

Joel blows the trumpet the second time, this time to call an assembly to fast and pray and confess sin. This is not to be the mere outward tearing of clothes, but rather the breaking of the heart. In 1:13, Joel called only for the priests to pray; in 2:16, he

summons everybody to participate in the fast. No doubt he reminded them of the promise of 2 Chron. 7:14.

D. Restoration (2:18–27).

We have had the alarm and the assembly; now we have the answer from the Lord. What faith Joel had—"The Lord will answer." God promises to drive away the army of locusts and restore the pastures again. In fact, He will give them such "bumper crops" that they will more than make up for the years wasted by the locusts (2:25). He will do this, not because they deserve it, but that they and the heathen nations might know that He is the Lord (v. 27).

II. The Day of the Lord Prophesied (2:28–3:21)

Now Joel moves ahead and talks about another "day of the Lord," a time of future judgment that will end in blessing for the Jews.

*A. The Spirit poured out **before that day** (2:28–32).*

This passage is quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), so read that quotation carefully. But notice that Peter does *not* say, "Joel's prophecy is fulfilled." Rather, he says, "This is that which was spoken." In other words, "This is that same Holy Spirit that Joel spoke about." The full prophecy of Joel, with its dramatic signs in the heavens, will not be fulfilled until the last days. By no stretch of your imagination can you find Joel's words literally fulfilled at Pentecost. No, what happened at Pentecost was but the beginning of God's blessing on Israel. Had the nation received Christ instead of arresting the apostles and killing Stephen, the promised "times of refreshing" would have come with the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom (Acts 3:19–26). Joel is telling us that during the last days of Israel's history, during the Tribulation period, the Spirit of God will work in mighty power in the saving of both Jews and Gentiles, and there will be mighty wonders and signs in the heavens. These are recorded in the Book of Revelation.

*B. Judgment poured out **during that day** (3:1–17).*

Verse 1 makes it clear that the Jews will be back in their land, delivered from the captivities in Gentile nations. But all the nations will gather together to fight Jerusalem. God will bring them into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, that is, the area of the Plain of Megiddo, where the Battle of Armageddon will be fought. Verses 2–8 make it clear that this judgment will be God's punishment on the Gentiles for the way they have treated the nation of Israel and the land of Israel. Palestine has been a plundered land; many Gentile nations have robbed the Jews of wealth that is rightfully theirs. God will recompense them in the Day of the Lord. In v. 2 when God promises to "plead" with the nations, this does not mean He will beg them to repent. The word "plead" can be translated "execute judgment"; see Isa. 66:16 and Jer. 25:31. Verse 13 compares the battle to a ripe harvest of grapes; see Rev. 14:14–20, a description of the Battle of

Armageddon. The “valley of decision” in v. 14 has nothing to do with “making a decision for the Lord.” The word “decision” suggests threshing; the nations will be threshed, judged by the Lord. Christ will defend His land, His people, and His holy city.

*C. Blessings poured out **after that day (3:18–21).***

As Joel preached, the people could see the dry fields, the starving cattle, and the empty barns. They could see and hear the locusts as they ravaged the country. But Joel is picturing a time when wine, milk, and water shall flow in ceaseless measure in the land. This is, of course, the kingdom age when Jesus Christ shall sit on David's throne in Jerusalem, and when the land shall be healed and the blessing of God restored. The nation will be cleansed, and God shall dwell in Zion. This reminds us of Ezekiel's final words: “And the name of the city from that day shall be, THE LORD IS THERE.”

We must not miss the personal application of Joel's message to believers today. Certainly God does send natural calamities when nations refuse to obey Him. Wars, poor crops, epidemics, earthquakes, storms—all of these can be used of God to bring people to their knees. God can even use little insects to do His will if men and women will not obey Him. Our lives personally can become dry and fruitless if we are out of God's will. How important it is to experience sincere deep repentance (2:12–13) that God might forgive us and send His blessings again.

Amos

It is about twenty-five years before the fall of Israel. We are visiting the city of Bethel, where King Jeroboam II has his private chapel and Amaziah is his priest. The nation is enjoying peace and prosperity; in fact, it is living in luxury. The impressive service is about to start, with Amaziah in charge, when we hear a commotion outside the chapel. “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion,” cries a voice. “God will send judgment upon this wicked nation.” We rush outside, and there we find a rustic “hill preacher” from Tekoa, named Amos (“burden”). He is not a prophet in the professional sense, for his father was not a prophet nor did he attend the prophetic schools (7:10–17). But he is God's man with God's message, and he is warning that judgment is coming to Israel. He uses the word “captivity” several times (5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:17). Let's pause and listen to this shepherd-farmer and seek to understand the message he is bringing.

I. He Looks Around (1–2)

Amos begins his message by looking around at the nations and announcing eight judgments. Verse 2 makes it clear that God is roaring in wrath, like a lion leaping on his prey (see 3:8). Amos begins with *Syria* (1:3–5) and accuses them of awful cruelty in war. Then he points to *Philistia* (Gaza, 1:6–8) and condemns them for the sin of slavery. The *Phoenicians* are next (Tyros, 1:9–10), and they are also judged for cruel slavery. Israel's old enemy *Edom* is accused of not showing pity but maintaining a constant

hatred (1:11–12). *Ammon* is judged for bitter cruelty and selfish greed (1:13–15); *Moab* for cruelty to *Edom* (2:1–3); and *Judah* for rejecting the Law of God (2:4–5).

It must have pleased the Israelites at Bethel to hear Amos condemn their neighbors, but Amos did not stop. Judgment #8 was reserved for—Israel. In 2:6–16 the prophet names the sins of the people: bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ingratitude, drunkenness (even forcing the Nazarites to drink), and rejecting God's revelation. Amos cries, "I am pressed under this burden of sin." (The name "Amos" means "burden.") How can God ever forgive such a wicked nation? Before we condemn these nations of the past, we had better examine our own nation and our own hearts, for we may be guilty of the same sins.

II. He Looks Within (3–6)

Having announced judgment to the nations, Amos now looks within the hearts of the people and explains why this judgment is coming. Remember that Israel was enjoying a time of peace, prosperity, and "religious revival." People were attending religious services and bringing generous offerings. But the true servants of God do not look at the outward appearance; they look at the heart. In these chapters, Amos delivers three sermons, each one prefaced by, "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1).

A. A message of explanation (3:1–15).

"How can our God send judgment upon us?" the people were asking. "Are we not His chosen people?" But that was the very reason for the judgment. Where there is privilege, there must also be responsibility. Verses 1–2 make this clear. Amos is using an argument from cause and effect. If two people are walking together, they must have made an appointment (v. 3). If a lion roars, he has prey (v. 4). If a bird is in the trap, somebody set the trap (v. 5). If the trumpet sounds, calamity is near (v. 6). If the prophet is preaching, then God must have sent him (v. 7). Then Amos announces that the Assyrians are coming to destroy the nation (vv. 9–15), and the lovely services at Bethel will not hold them back. Alas, the summer houses and winter houses (what luxury!) will all be destroyed.

B. A message of accusation (4:1–13).

The fearless prophet "starts meddling" now and begins to name sins. He calls the women living in careless luxury "fat cows of Bashan." See them telling their husbands to bring them more drinks. Amos is not impressed with the religion at Bethel; to him it is just another sin on their records. God had sent his warnings to them (vv. 6–11), but they would not listen. He had taken the best of their young men to die in war (4:10), but still the nation did not repent. God would no longer use natural calamities. Now He would come Himself (v. 12). "Prepare to meet your God."

C. A message of lamentation (5:1–6:14).

Amos weeps as he contemplates the judgments coming to his nation. Verse 3 suggests that 90 percent of the people will die. Note the repetition of the word “seek” (5:4, 6, 8, 14). “Don’t seek religious services; seek the Lord!” There were some in the nation who were saying, “The day of the Lord will come and then God will deliver us” (5:18–20). They did not realize that the Day of the Lord would be a time of judgment for *them* as well as for their enemies. They are like Christians today who “long for” the return of Christ, yet may not be prepared to meet the Lord. In 5:24 we have the key verse of the book; read “justice” instead of “judgment.” Amos longed to see the nation obeying God and executing His justice in the land. In chapter 6 Amos continues to weep over the sins of the people: indifference and indulgence (vv. 1–6); injustice, immorality, and idolatry (vv. 7–14). “At ease in Zion”—what a description of some believers today!

III. He Looks Ahead (7–9)

In the closing part of his message, Amos beholds five visions, and from these visions he discovers what God will do to the nation. (1) *Vision of Locusts* (7:1–3)—The locusts are about to destroy the crop, but Amos intercedes and the Lord stops them. (2) *Vision of Fire* (7:4–6)—An awful drought overtakes the land; the prophet prays, and God delivers the land. (3) *Vision of the Plumb line* (7:7–9)—The Lord stands beside (not “upon”) the wall and tests it to see if it is straight. God is measuring Israel, and she does not conform to His Word; therefore, judgment is coming. At this point in the message, the “state priest” Amaziah could take no more, and he interrupted, “You are not patriotic! Take your soapbox and go back to the hills to preach.” Amos was not afraid. He told the false priest, “God called me to preach, and I must obey. As for you, Amaziah, you will pay for your compromise and sins, because your wife will become a harlot and your family will die by the sword.”

(4) *Vision of the Summer Fruit* (8:1–14)—We must take a brief lesson in Hebrew to understand this vision. The Hebrew word for “summer fruit” is *hayitz*, and the word for “end” in v. 2 is *hatz*. These words look and sound alike, and Amos used one to lead to the other. “The end is come! Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgment.” Again in vv. 4–14 the prophet names the sins of the people: robbing the poor of their homes (8:4); complaining about holy days interfering with business (8:5); setting excessive prices that hurt the poor (8:6). God warns that He will send His wrath upon the people, not only in natural calamities, but in a famine for the Word of God. They would not listen to the Word when they had the opportunity; therefore, He will take His Word away from them. In that day their idols at Dan and Beersheba will do them no good (8:14).

(5) *Vision at the Altar* (9:1–10)—Now Amos sees the Lord Himself, and not some symbol. Why is God at the altar? Because judgment begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). The people had been outwardly religious, but they were not sincere from the heart. God orders the doorposts to be broken—and the roof caves in. Verses 8–9 summarize what God plans to do. He compares the coming judgment to the sifting of grain (see Luke 22:31–34). The good seed (true believers, the believing remnant) will be saved, but the chaff will be burned up.

Amos closes on a note of victory, for in 9:11–15 we have the promise of future restoration. Verses 11–12 are quoted in Acts 15:14–18 at the first church conference. Today God is calling out of the nations a people for His name, the church; but when the church is completed, then He will return and restore the tabernacle (house) of David and establish the Jewish kingdom. The land will become fruitful again, and the people will be blessed forever.

Obadiah

The time: 586 B.C.; the place: Jerusalem; the event: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. We see the angry soldiers as they wreck the walls, slay the people, and burn the city. But we see something else. We see a group of neighboring citizens—the Edomites—as they stand on the other side and encourage the Babylonians to ruin the city. “Raze it! Raze it!” they are calling. “Dash their little children against the stones and wipe out the Jews!” (Ps. 137:7–9) Who are these people who desire such terrible things to happen to their neighbors? They are brethren to the Jews. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s older brother (Gen. 25:21–26). Esau was outwardly a much better man than scheming Jacob, yet God chose Jacob and rejected Esau. Esau moved to the mountains in the south and established the Edomite kingdom (Idumaea), but they remained enemies.

This little Book of Obadiah (the shortest in the OT) deals with these two brothers, Esau and Jacob—Edom and Israel. The prophet presents a two-fold message:

I. God’s Vengeance on Esau (vv. 1–16)

In Jer. 49:7–22, Jeremiah had already announced the doom of Edom; in fact, there are some quotations from his prophecy here in Obadiah. This is the “rumor” or “report” that Obadiah had heard: God would avenge Israel and destroy Edom. Why? Because of her sins. What were these sins?

A. *Pride (vv. 3–4).*

Edom was a small nation, but she boasted of her achievements. Edom was actually cut out of the rocks; the people literally “nested” in the rocks (v. 4). Edom’s chief city, Petra, was carved out of the sides of the mountains, and the fortress seemed impregnable. Compare Isa. 14:12–15.

B. *Confederacy (v. 7).*

Instead of sharing the burden of their brothers in Israel, the Edomites allied with the surrounding nations to oppress Jerusalem.

C. Violence (v. 10).

The Edomites assisted in the wrecking of Jerusalem. How? By doing nothing to prevent it, and by encouraging those who actually did the damage. They stood “on the other side” (v. 11) and refused to stand with the Jews. This reminds us of the priest and Levite in Christ’s Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:31–33). We may not actually lift a hand to hurt another, but by watching and doing nothing, we are sharing in the crime.

D. Rejoicing (v. 12).

Edom should have been weeping over his brother’s calamity, but instead he was rejoicing and jeering. See Prov. 24:17–18.

E. Looting (v. 13).

They took advantage of the plight of the Jews and robbed the city of its wealth. This plundering was seen by God even though the thieves escaped.

F. Hindering Jews from escaping (v. 14).

Some of the Jews tried to escape and protect their families, but the Edomites blocked the way. They even helped capture those who did escape and returned them to the Babylonians.

G. Drunken celebration (v. 16).

The Edomites got to the wine supplies and held a great celebration. At last, their enemy was defeated.

But note v. 15—God would treat them just the way they treated the Jews. See Ps. 137:8–9 also. They were traitors to the Jews; therefore, their own confederates would betray them (v. 7). They plundered and looted, so their nation would be robbed (vv. 5–6). Edom was violent, so they would be cut off completely (vv. 9–10). Edom wanted the Jews to be destroyed, so she would be destroyed by Babylon (vv. 10, 18). Edom would reap what she sowed. See also Isa. 34:5–15; Ezek. 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12.

II. God’s Victory for Jacob (vv. 17–21)

That little word “but” in v. 17 marks the turning point. God promises deliverance and cleansing for Mt. Zion. Yes, Israel had sinned, and the temple was destroyed because of their sins, but God would cleanse and restore “the house of Jacob” and not the house of Esau (the Edomites). Note in v. 18 that there is reunion as well as restoration, for the house of Joseph (the southern tribes) and the house of Jacob will both be as a fire against Edom. The day will come when the Jews will “possess their possessions”—their land, their temple, their city, and their kingdom. The key word in vv. 17–20 is “possess.” Certainly Israel owns the land because of God’s promise to Abraham. She owns her city too. But she does not fully possess them, for her land has been overrun by the Gentile nations for centuries. There is coming the day, however, when Jesus Christ will return to

give Israel back her possessions that she might enjoy them and use them to the glory of God.

“And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.” What a wonderful way to end this brief book! Today, the King has been rejected, and David’s throne is empty in Jerusalem. The Jews are in the sad condition described in Hosea 3:4–5—without king, priest, sacrifice, or priesthood. But when Christ returns, the nation will look upon the One they pierced, they will be cleansed and forgiven, and the kingdom will be established. Daniel saw Christ, the Stone, come down and crush all the kingdoms of the world (Dan. 2:44–45). No matter what may happen to the affairs of Israel as the Gentile nations seek to control her or capture her, you may be sure that God will watch over His people and one day give them their promised kingdom.

But we must look deeper into this book if we want to get the full spiritual message, for “Esau” and “Jacob” stand for something more than two brothers and two nations. They represent two opposing forces—the flesh and the Spirit. Esau was a good-looking man, active, healthy, outgoing, athletic; Jacob was a homebody, full of deceit and selfish plans. If you were choosing one of these boys, no doubt you would have selected Esau; but God chose Jacob. Throughout the Bible, He is known as “the God of Jacob.” This is God’s grace. Salvation is not by merit; it is by grace and grace alone. God used Jacob to father the tribes of Israel. God gave His covenants and promises to Jacob, not to Esau.

So, Jacob represents the child of God, chosen by God’s grace, often sinning and failing, but ultimately gaining his inheritance. He represents the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26). Esau pictures the flesh—attractive, powerful, proud, grasping, rebellious, and always seeming to be on the winning side. Yet God has pronounced judgment on the flesh, and one day that judgment will fall. Edom was proud and rebellious; Edom laughed when Jerusalem fell. Five years later, however, Edom also fell to the Babylonians—and where is Edom today? This world boasts of the flesh, what the flesh has accomplished, how strong the flesh is; but one day all flesh will fall before the victory of Christ. Read Rev. 19:11–21, and note especially vv. 17–18 where “flesh” is mentioned repeatedly.

The struggle between Esau and Jacob, flesh and Spirit, runs all through the Bible. The Herods of the NT were Edomites. One of them killed the Jewish babies in his attempt to destroy Christ (Matt. 2:16–18). Another Herod murdered John the Baptist; another one killed James the brother of John (Acts 12). The struggle between the Israelis and the Arabs today is but a continuation of this same battle that started in Gen. 25:21–26. Flesh vs. Spirit, pride vs. submission, man’s way vs. God’s way: the struggle will go on until Christ returns and establishes His kingdom.

There is a law of retribution written into history: nations receive back just what they have given to others (v. 15). See Jer. 50:29. In particular, the Gentile nations will be called to account for the way they have treated the Jews. It may take years, but God’s judgment will fall on all those who refuse to do His will.

Jonah

That Jonah was an actual person in history is verified by 2 Kings 14:25, where we find his prophecy that Jeroboam II would expand his kingdom. This message certainly made him a popular preacher. But when God called Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, then the prophet rebelled. History tells us that the Assyrians were a cruel and heartless people who thought nothing of burying their enemies alive, skinning them alive, or impaling them on sharp poles under the hot sun. "If the city of Nineveh is going to be overthrown, then let it be overthrown," argued Jonah. "I would rather disobey God than see my enemies saved from judgment." In the four chapters of his book, Jonah traces his experiences and the lessons that he learned.

I. Resignation—The Lesson of God's Patience (1)

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah ran in the opposite direction. He fled "from the presence of the Lord," which means that he resigned his prophetic office. Jonah knew that he could not run away from God's presence (Ps. 139:7ff), but he could resign his calling and stop preaching. He became a backslidden prophet.

A. *The causes of his backsliding were many.*

First, he had the wrong attitude toward God's will; he thought it was something difficult and dangerous. And he had the wrong attitude toward witnessing; he thought he could "turn his witnessing on and off" when he wanted to, and did not realize that he was witnessing either against or for the Lord no matter where he was. He also had the wrong attitude toward his enemies: he *wanted* to see them perish.

B. *The course of his backsliding was downward.*

Down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the sea, and down into the great fish. Disobedience always leads downward. But note that often things seem to "work out" even for a backslidden believer, for the ship was waiting for him and he had the money to pay the fare. He was so at peace that he was even able to go to sleep in the storm!

C. *The consequences of his backsliding were tragic.*

He lost God's voice, for now God had to speak to him in a storm. He lost his spiritual energy and went to sleep in the hold of the ship. He lost his power in prayer, and even his desire to pray. The heathen were praying, but Jonah was sleeping. He lost his testimony with the men on the ship, and he lost his influence for good, because he was the cause of the storm. He also almost lost his life. But how patient and long-suffering the Lord was with him.

II. Repentance—The Lesson of God's Pardon (2)

Jonah was first of all chastened under the loving hand of God. Jonah admitted it was God who cast him into the sea, not the hands of the sailors (v. 3). When trials and afflictions come to us because of our sins, it is important that we acknowledge God's working (Ps. 119:67). Read Heb. 12:5–11 to see the meaning of divine chastening. Next Jonah was convicted of his sins, and this, after all, is the purpose of chastening—to bring us to the place of conviction and confession. He lost the presence of God (2:4; see Ps. 51:11); he admitted he had believed the devil's lies (v. 8); and he showed true sorrow for his sins (v. 9). In faith he asked God for His forgiveness, looking toward the temple (v. 4) as the OT Jew was taught to do (2 Chron. 6:36–39). This is equivalent to our 1 John 1:9. God cleansed Jonah and gave him another chance.

According to Heb. 12:5–11, there are several ways Christians may respond to the chastening of God: we may despise it, as Jonah did for three days, and refuse to confess; we may faint and give up; or we may endure God's chastening, confess our sins, and trust Him to work everything out for our good and His glory. To rebel against the hand of God is to ask for trouble. Jonah submitted, prayed, and trusted, and God forgave him.

III. Revival—The Lesson of God's Power (3)

The key word in this chapter is “great.” Jonah came to the great city to preach the message of God. There were nearly a million people in and around Nineveh, and the city itself had great walls and towers. It was the center of the rising empire of Assyria. But it was a sinful city (read Nahum 3) because the Assyrians were a ruthless, cruel people who had no pity for their enemies. “Violence” was their chief sin (v. 8). God gave Jonah a great commission, to preach to these Gentiles that they could escape the wrath of God and be forgiven. What a message! Jonah had to overcome his sinful prejudices to preach this message. Then, God performed a great change in the city, for from the king to the lowest citizen, there were expressions of fear and repentance. Two things contributed to this: Jonah's message and the miracle of Jonah's deliverance from the great fish, the news of which certainly reached this city. It took three days to get through Nineveh, but revival came the very first day of Jonah's ministry. The people “believed God” (v. 5), proving their faith by their works of contrition. And God forgave them. This was undoubtedly one of the greatest evangelistic harvests in history. It shows what the Lord can do with a frail human instrument willing to preach God's message.

Jesus used Nineveh to illustrate an important point (Matt. 12:38–41). He had preached to that generation for three years and had reinforced His message with His miracles, yet they would not repent and believe. The Ninevites heard *one* sermon from *one* preacher, and that sermon emphasized wrath, not love—yet they repented and were forgiven. The Jews heard the Son of God for three years, heard the message of God's forgiveness, yet refused to repent. Certainly theirs will be the greater condemnation.

IV. Rebellion—The Lesson of God's Pity (4)

Had you been writing this last chapter, you probably would have shown Jonah in the city of Nineveh, carefully teaching the people and helping them in their spiritual decisions. But God does not write it that way. Instead of meeting a rejoicing preacher, we meet a rebellious preacher, angry at the people and angry at God. We see an adult acting like a child, a believer acting like an unbeliever. We see Jonah sitting outside the city, trying to make himself comfortable, and actually hoping that God's judgment will fall on the people. Here is an amazing thing: God sent a great awakening under the preaching of a man who did not even love the souls of the people he preached to!

This is the key lesson of the book: God's love and pity for lost souls. Jonah felt sorry for himself, and even felt sorry for the plant that sheltered him and then died, but he had no heartfelt love or pity for the multitudes in the city of Nineveh. It is possible to serve the Lord and yet not love the people. How unlike Jesus Christ he is in this chapter, for Jesus looked upon a city of lost souls and wept. God could control the wind and waves in chapter 1, the fish in chapter 2, and the gourd, worm, and wind in chapter 4, but He could not control Jonah without the prophet's surrender. Everything in nature obeys the Word of God except human beings, and human beings have the greatest reason to obey. It would seem that Jonah did get right with God, confess his sins, and continue his ministry. And God did spare the city of Nineveh for another century and a half.

Of course, Jonah is a type of Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:39–41) in His death, burial, and resurrection. Christ was greater than Jonah in His person (He is the Son of God), His outreach (the whole world, not one city), His sacrifice (He did die to save others), and His love for those who did not deserve it. Some also see in Jonah a picture of the Jewish nation: disobedient; cast out of the land; "swallowed up" by the sea of Gentiles; preserved in spite of opposition; brought back again and given another chance.

Micah

The names of the kings in Micah 1:1 tell us that the prophet preached at the same time in history as Isaiah (Isa. 1:1). It is not difficult to imagine these two men ministering in Judah, encouraging each other and seeking to spread the Word of the Lord. Of the rulers, Jotham and Hezekiah were good kings who helped the nation, but Ahaz was a wicked man who sold the nation into idolatry.

This little book is composed of three "sermons" that Micah preached to the people, and each message begins with the word "hear." He deals with three very practical and important themes:

I. Judgment Is Coming (1–2)

Micah wastes no time getting into his message. God has spoken to him and warned him that the sins of the people are so great that He must send judgment. He names the capital cities in v. 1—Jerusalem (capital of Judah, the Southern Kingdom) and Samaria (capital of Israel, the Northern Kingdom). In fact, in this first message, Micah names

twelve cities and points out their sins. The sins of the cities were polluting the whole nation. That sounds very up-to-date.

What were some of the sins that God would judge? Idolatry (“high places” in 1:5) was the main sin. The people insisted on worshipping “the works of their own hands” (5:13). But people do that today. We may not carve out statues and bow before them, but we certainly live for the things we have manufactured—cars, clothes, houses, money. What we serve and sacrifice for is the thing that we worship. Micah warned that the day would come when God would destroy the idols of the people and turn them to dust (1:6–7).

In 2:1 we see the sin of covetousness: people would lie awake at night thinking up new ways to get “things,” and then get up early to carry out their plans. According to Col. 3:5, covetousness *is* idolatry. Many people today have an insatiable appetite to get more things. “Take heed and beware of covetousness,” warned Jesus, “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15, edW_J). The people were not only covetous, but they used illegal means to get what they wanted—fraud, threats, violence (2:2). The rich took advantage of the poor, and the rulers did not obey the Law of God.

How did Micah respond to this awful message of judgment? He wept and mourned (1:8–9). Then he sent a personal message to each of the wicked cities, warning them that the day of God’s wrath was just around the corner. He uses a bit of sarcasm in 1:10–16, relating each message to the name of the particular city to which it is sent. Aphrah means “dust,” and they shall roll in the dust. Saphir means “beautiful,” but the people shall go naked. Zaanan means “to go forth,” but the citizens will be too afraid to go forth.

How did the people react to Micah’s preaching? They tried to stop him. In 2:6 they say, “Stop preaching such terrible things! You know they will not happen to us. We are God’s people.” But Micah says, “I must preach—the Spirit of God compels me.” Micah knew that the people did not want honest preaching; they preferred their drunken false prophets who lived as wickedly as the people did (2:10–11).

II. The Deliverer Is Coming (3–5)

Not discouraged by their slanders, Micah moves now into his second message, a message of hope. First he condemns the wicked leaders of the land—the rulers, the false prophets, and the priests (3:1–7). They were devouring the people instead of helping them, and they refused to serve unless they were paid. It was the sin of covetousness again. The prophets were preaching what the people wanted to hear: “All is well—nothing will happen to us.” But Micah knew that Israel would fall to Assyria (this happened in 721), and that the Babylonians would carry Judah away captive (this happened in 606–586).

Chapter 4, though, takes up a wonderful new theme: one day there will be peace on earth and righteousness will reign. Mt. Zion will become the capital of the world; all the armies will be dismissed and the weapons destroyed. How can this happen? Through the promise in chapter 5: The Deliverer will come. Micah has mentioned twelve cities, but now he mentions one more—Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus (5:2–3; Matt. 2:6). It is this prophecy that led the wise men to Jesus. Of course, the Jews rejected their

Prince of Peace, so there has been no peace in the world. But when Christ returns to earth, He will establish His kingdom of peace and there shall be no more war.

Meanwhile, men and women can have peace in their hearts by trusting Christ as Savior (Rom. 5:1). And this is the theme of Micah's final message, for he calls the people to make their decision to trust the Lord and obey Him.

III. Trust the Lord Today (6–7)

The scene here is a courtroom, and God has called His people to be judged. "State your case against Me," He says. "I have a complaint against you," announces the Lord, "for I have done all I can do for you, yet you have rejected Me. I brought you out of Egypt; I led you in the wilderness; I protected you from your enemies. What more could I have done?"

In 6:6–8, the people answer: "Yes, we have sinned. How can we make up for all that we have done? We could bring sacrifices, but they can never wash away sins. All our religion can never save us. Even if we sacrificed our own children, that would not cleanse us. We know what God wants us to do: to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before our God." How true this is! God does not want extravagant gifts and sacrifices; He wants our hearts (Ps. 51:16–17; 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:10–18).

God speaks again in 6:9–16. "You must repent and obey, because judgment is on the way. Then you will discover how terrible your sins have been, your cheating and your lies. You will try to satisfy yourselves, but it will not work. You will eat but still be hungry; you will save money, but it will vanish; you will plant crops but never harvest them." What a tragic picture. Imagine seeing everything you do accomplish nothing because you are out of the will of God.

Micah the prophet speaks in 7:1–10. He laments the fact that the nation is so wicked he cannot find an honest man. Bribery, injustice, dishonesty, and greed rule the land. But Micah has faith in God (7:7–10). If God is going to punish, all Micah can do is wait patiently for Him to work. If the Lord chastens His own people for their sins, certainly He will punish the enemy for their sins also.

In 7:11–17, God makes promises to His people that He will restore them in the future. The wicked cities will be restored and cleansed, and the nation will be established in glory. But first, the Jews must go through a time of tribulation. They have been suffering for centuries, of course, but there will be a special time of trial after Christ takes the church to heaven. This is the Tribulation, or the time of Jacob's trouble.

The closing verses (7:18–20) are a wonderful confession of faith, the whole purpose of Micah's message. He wants to bring the people to faith in the Lord. God is the only One who can forgive sins (Mark 2:7; Ps. 32:5). He alone will show mercy and love to sinners; He will cast their sins into the depths of the sea. This is why Christ died, that sinners might be forgiven. Have you trusted Him and asked Him to forgive your sins? This is the theme of Micah's last message: "Trust the Lord today!"

Nahum

Imagine how happy the people of Judah were when they heard: “Nineveh has fallen! The Assyrian empire is no more!” (cf. 1:15) Assyria was a ruthless enemy that practiced brutality on men, women, and children. Their armies destroyed and looted; they buried their enemies alive and even skinned them alive; they impaled people on sharp poles and left them to burn in the sun. Assyria had been used of God to chasten the Northern Kingdom of Israel; that happened in 721 B.C. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians tried to conquer Judah, but God intervened and destroyed their army (Isa. 36–37). Still, Assyria was always the scourge of the nations; every nation feared her and tried to win her approval. Finally in 612 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians; and so complete was their conquest that the ruins of the city remained undiscovered until 1842.

It was concerning this future destruction of Nineveh that Nahum wrote. He wrote this little book at a time when Assyria was at the very peak of her power. Nobody would have dreamed that mighty Nineveh would fall, but God knows the future and He gave His message to Nahum to deliver to the frightened people of Judah. This was not a message of warning to Nineveh; they had heard God's warning from Jonah a century and a half before. No, there was no hope for Nineveh; God's patience had run out and His judgment would fall. Rather, this was a message of hope for Judah, to encourage them to trust God at an hour of great danger. Each of the three chapters tells us something about God and also about the fall of the city.

I. God Is Jealous: Nineveh Will Fall (1)

The word “jealous” when applied to God does not suggest envy or selfishness. It carries the idea of being zealous for His glory and for His holiness. He burns with hatred against sin even though He loves the sinner. Just as a husband is jealous over his wife and therefore protects her, so God is jealous over His people and His law, and therefore must act in holiness and justice. He is slow to anger; in fact, He gave Nineveh 150 years of mercy. But they had gone too far in their brutality and violence, and God had to judge them.

Does God have the power to judge? Of course He does. Look at His power in nature (vv. 3–6), in winds and storms, in rains and droughts, on land and sea. Who can stand before His power? Nations today seem to forget the power of Almighty God. They act as though there is no God. But you can be sure that the day of judgment will come, and in that day no nation will be able to escape.

In vv. 8–13, Nahum describes the fall of the city with two pictures: a great flood of waters that sweeps everything away; and a fire of dry thorns that burns like stubble. It is interesting to note that Nineveh did fall because of a flood of waters. The Medes and Babylonians besieged the city for many months and made little headway. Then the rainy season came and the two rivers next to Nineveh began to rise. One historian says that the Medes broke one of the dams on the river. But in any case, the swelling waters beat against the thick walls of Nineveh and broke them down. The city was literally destroyed by the flood; see also Nahum 2:6. God does not need armies; He can use tiny raindrops!

God makes two wonderful promises to His people in this chapter. In 1:7, He assures them of His goodness and tells them they will be safe so long as they trust in Him. In 1:12, He assures them that He will not afflict them again with the Assyrian armies the way Israel had been afflicted before. No matter what the difficulties may be, we can trust God to care for us and see us through.

II. God Is Judge: Nineveh's Fall Is Great (2)

In the Hebrew text, 1:15 is actually the beginning of the second chapter. It is the joyful announcement that Nineveh has fallen. See also Isa. 52:7 for a similar announcement about the fall of Babylon; and see Paul's use of this for today in Rom. 10:15. The person who brings a message of hope and victory is a person with beautiful feet. As Christians we all ought to have beautiful feet as we carry the message of the Gospel to the lost.

Chapter 2 is a vivid picture of the invasion of the city and its ultimate fall. Assyria had emptied Israel in 721; now God was going to restore His people by punishing the enemy (vv. 1–2). The Medes wore scarlet uniforms and used scarlet shields (v. 3). The armies with their spears and lances looked like a forest of fir trees. Please do not make 2:4 a prophecy of the modern automobile. It only pictures the chariots in the streets of the city. *Huzzab* in v. 7 refers probably to the queen, being led away in great humiliation.

Note the repeated reference to lions in vv. 11–13. The lion was the symbol of the Assyrian empire, as you can see from pictures in history or archaeology books. They built huge statues of lions with the heads of men. "Where are your lions now?" Nahum asks. "Where are your rulers, your champions?"

"I am against you" (v. 13, nkjv). God brought the Medes and Babylonians against Nineveh and permitted them to spoil the city and take its wealth. For 150 years He had waited for Assyria to turn, but she refused. God is Judge among the nations; He must act.

III. God Is Just: Nineveh Deserves to Fall (3)

Here Nahum deals with the justice of this act. Some might say, "But God used Assyria to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Why punish Nineveh when once He used her as His own tool?" Or they might argue, "Look at the kingdom of Judah. She is full of sin too. Why not punish her?" Well, God would punish Judah in a few years (606–586); He would permit the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and take the people captive. But His purpose for Judah would be different from His purpose for Nineveh. God would chasten Judah in love to teach her a lesson; He would judge Assyria in anger to destroy her for her sins.

In 3:1 we see the great sins of Assyria listed: murders, lies, and covetousness. The Assyrians had murdered thousands of innocent people; now their own people would be slain and their bodies stacked in the streets like lumber. Nineveh had carried on a profitable commerce with the other nations and had grown rich through lies and violence. But now all their wealth would vanish in the hands of the looters. This is the justice of God. And in that day of judgment, the Assyrian soldiers (usually so brave) would act like frightened women. Every means of fortification would fail.

In vv. 15–17, Nahum compares the battle to a plague of locusts. Just as the worms eat up the crops, so the enemy would eat up the city. The Assyrian soldiers would be as strong as grasshoppers. Then in v. 18 Nahum sees the Assyrians as a slaughtered flock of sheep, their shepherds (rulers) sleeping in death.

The word “bruit” in v. 19 of the King James means “news, report.” When the nations got the report of the destruction of Assyria, they clapped their hands and shouted for joy. The Lord judges the sins of nations and the sins of individuals. It is tragic to reject His warnings and persist in sin. “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

Habakkuk

Have you ever looked out upon this world with its injustice and violence, and asked the question: “Why doesn’t God do something?” It looks like the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering. Godly people pray, but it seems as though their prayers do no good. This is the problem faced and solved in Habakkuk. Note three acts in this personal drama as the prophet faces his doubts and finds certainty in his faith.

I. The Prophet Wondering (1)

A. *“Why is God silent and inactive?” (vv. 1–4)*

This was the first problem that puzzled the prophet. He looked out across the world of that day and saw violence (1:2–3, 9; 2:8, 17), injustice, spoiling, strife, and contention. The law was not enforced; there was no legal protection for innocent people who were sentenced as guilty. The courts were manipulated by selfish lawyers and cruel officials. The whole nation was suffering because of the evils of the government. Yet God seemed to be doing nothing about it. Along with these internal problems was the threat of the Babylonian empire as it swept across the political landscape.

God gave the prophet an answer in 5–11. “I am working a work that will amaze you,” God said. “I will raise up the Chaldeans who will conquer the nations and be my instrument to chasten the people.” How true it is that God is working in our world and we fail to realize it (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17). Paul quotes 1:5 in Acts 13:41, applying it to the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. God describes the Chaldean armies in these verses, and the picture is not a pretty one. They are bitter and swift; they are terrible and dreadful; they fly as eagles and swoop down for the kill. Habakkuk did not have to be told about the terror of the Chaldeans, for he knew how wicked they were.

B. *“How can God use such a sinful nation for a holy cause?” (vv. 12–17)*

God’s answer in vv. 5–11 only created a new problem for Habakkuk. He could not understand how a holy God could use such a wicked nation to punish His own chosen people, the Jews. “It is true that we have sinned,” says Habakkuk, “and we deserve chastening; but the Chaldeans are far more wicked than we are. If anyone deserves

punishment, it is the Chaldeans.” Can a holy God sit and watch His own people being caught like fish or trampled like insects? (vv. 14–15) The Chaldeans will boast, “*Our gods have given us the victory. Jehovah is not the true God.*”

There is nothing wrong with a believer wrestling with the problems of life and seeking to solve them. Sometimes it seems as though God does not care; it appears that He has forsaken His own and is helping the heathen. How many millions of believers have been martyred for their faith. Can we honestly worship, trust, and serve a God whose ways are so seemingly contradictory?

II. The Prophet Watching and Waiting (2)

Instead of becoming an atheist or agnostic, Habakkuk went to his watchtower to pray, meditate, and wait on the Lord. He knew that God heard his complaint and that He would send an answer soon. God *did* answer. “I have a plan and a schedule,” God said. “It will all work out in due time, so don’t become impatient.” Then God gave to Habakkuk three very wonderful assurances to encourage and strengthen him during those difficult days.

A. “*The just shall live by faith*” (v. 4).

This is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. It forms the text for three NT books: Romans (1:17—emphasis is on *the just*); Galatians (3:11—emphasis is on *shall live*); and Hebrews (10:38—emphasis is on *by faith*). Verse 4 describes two kinds of people: those who are “puffed up” because they trust in themselves, and those who are saved and humble because they trust in the Lord. See the Pharisee and publican in Luke 18:9–14. The Chaldeans were the ones who were puffed up by their victories, not realizing that it was God who enabled them to conquer.

B. “*The earth shall be filled with God’s glory*” (v. 14).

The earth in Habakkuk’s day was certainly not filled with much glory, nor is it today. Look at the five “Woes” in this chapter, and you will see the sins that God hates: greedy and violent covetousness (vv. 5–11); murder for gain (v. 12); drunkenness (vv. 15–16); and idolatry (v. 19). These are the very sins that are polluting nations today. And God hates these sins today just as much as He did back in Habakkuk’s day. But the promise still stands that God’s glory shall one day fill this earth, for Jesus Christ shall return, put down all sin, and establish His righteous kingdom.

C. “*The Lord is in His holy temple*” (v. 20).

God is still on the throne (Isa. 6). We have no need to complain or doubt, for He is ruling and overruling in the affairs of nations. Habakkuk thought that God was uninterested in the problems of life, but he discovered that God was very much concerned, and that He was working out His own plan in His own time. This is why the just live *by faith*. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7; 4:18). If we look at ourselves, or at circumstances, we will be discouraged and want to quit, but if we look up to God by

faith, and ahead to the glorious return of Christ, then we will be encouraged and enabled to go on in victory.

III. The Prophet Worshiping (3)

Habakkuk is a changed man! Instead of complaining, he is praising the Lord. God turns sighing into singing if we (like Habakkuk) take time to wait before Him in prayer and listen to His Word.

First, the prophet prays (v. 2). "I see that You are working in this world," says the prophet, referring to 1:5. "Now continue that work—keep it alive and finish it." The word "revive" here has nothing to do with our modern "revival meetings." Habakkuk is simply asking the Lord to keep on working. He knows that there will be wrath and judgment, but he prays that God will remember mercy too.

Then the prophet ponders (vv. 3–16). He reviews the history of Israel and the wonderful works of the Lord. This poetic description of God's mighty power does not seem to follow any special pattern, nor does it cover all the main events in Jewish history. But Habakkuk knew that God had worked in the past, and therefore he could trust Him to work in the present and future. The mountains trembled before the Lord—and so would the Chaldeans. "Jehovah is a man of war." Israel was His people; He would care for them.

Finally, the prophet praises (vv. 17–19). These verses represent one of the greatest confessions of faith found in the Bible. "Though everything around me fail—the fields, the vineyards, the flocks, the herds—yet will I rejoice in the Lord." This is the OT version of Phil. 4:11–13. Habakkuk knew that he had no strength of his own, but that God could give him the strength he would need to go through the trials that lay ahead. "He will make me like a deer—I will jump over the mountains."

How much more this ought to mean to us. Habakkuk looked through the fog and mist and wondered at God's program, but in Christ we *know* God's plans for this age (Eph. 1:8–10, and chap. 3). We have the entire Bible to study, and Habakkuk did not have this. We have the record of life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, as well as the promise of His coming again. If any people ought to walk by faith and rejoice in the Lord, it is the Christian church today. Yet too often we doubt, complain, run ahead of God, and even criticize what God is doing.

Habakkuk shows us how to deal with life's problems: (1) admit them honestly; (2) talk to God about them; (3) wait quietly before Him in prayer and meditation on the Word; (4) when He speaks, listen and obey. Never run away from the difficulties of life, because God wants to use those difficulties to strengthen your faith. "Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light." The just shall live by faith.

Zephaniah

This man is no ordinary preacher. He is the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, one of Judah's most famous rulers. He has royal blood in his veins, but more important,

he has the message of God on his lips. Strange to say, Zephaniah preached during the reign of godly King Josiah, and it was a time of religious “revival” (see 2 Kings 22–23). Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight, and at the age of sixteen he committed himself to the Lord. When he was twenty, he began a great reformation in the land, pulling down the idols and judging the false priests and prophets. He then began to rebuild the temple and led the nation in a celebration of the Passover. To all appearances, it was a time of religious concern and consecration.

But Zephaniah saw deeper; he saw the hearts of the people, and he knew that their religious zeal was not sincere. The reforms were shallow; the people got rid of the idols in their homes, but not the idols in their hearts. The rulers of the land were still greedy and disobedient, and the city of Jerusalem was the source of all kinds of wickedness in the land. Even today, many believers lack discernment and think that every “religious movement” is a genuine work of the Lord. Sometimes mere outward reformation only prepares the way for a work of the devil (Matt. 12:43–45).

We may divide Zephaniah's message into three parts, two dealing with judgment and one with mercy.

I. God Will Judge Judah (1:1–2:3)

What a statement: “I will utterly destroy everything from off the land.” Judgment is coming and nothing will escape. It will include birds, beasts, and fish; it will especially affect the idols (“stumbling blocks”) of the wicked; and it will wipe out the population of the land. In v. 4 God names the trouble spots: Judah and Jerusalem. What? The people of God going through judgment? Yes. The city of God, the place where the temple stands? Yes! How can God destroy His holy people and His holy city? He does it because of their sins, and particularly the sin of idolatry (vv. 4–6). The prophet describes three kinds of sinners in these verses: those who have forsaken Jehovah and who worship only idols, vv. 4–5a; those who worship *both* Jehovah and the idols, v. 5b; and those who have forsaken the Lord openly and want nothing to do with Him, v. 6. These same attitudes are with us today.

The coming judgment is described in vv. 7–18. He calls it “the Day of the Lord,” a phrase used by several other OT writers, especially Joel. “The Day of the Lord” has a two-fold meaning: (1) locally, God's judgments on Israel and Judah in the past; (2) prophetically, that future time of judgment when God will pour out His wrath (Rev. 6–19). In this case, “the Day of the Lord” would be the Babylonian invasion in 606 B.C. and the destruction of the city and temple in 586 B.C. Zephaniah sees this invasion as a great “sacrifice”; see also Rev. 19:17–18. The noise of the invasion will start at the fish gate, the farthest gate in the city, and then travel right up to the top of Mt. Zion. But it will not be foreign soldiers doing the work; it will be God searching out the city, as with a lamp, exposing sin and punishing wickedness. Verses 14–16 use eleven different words to describe the coming day of the Lord. Rich and poor alike will suffer; no one's silver or gold will be able to save him.

In 2:1–3 the prophet turns to Jerusalem and Judah and pleads with the people to turn to the Lord and repent of their sins. “Before God's decree of judgment comes to pass, while there is still time, turn to the Lord and ask for mercy.” Alas, the nation was content to be “religious”; they would not turn from their sins.

II. God Will Judge the Nations (2:4–3:7)

The prophet names the various Gentile nations around Judah and announces that God will judge them for their sins as well. He begins with Philistia (vv. 4–7) and predicts that their populous coasts will become pastures for the flocks. Then he names Moab and Ammon (vv. 8–11), both of whom came from backslidden Lot (Gen. 19:33–38). They had mistreated God's people and proudly "magnified themselves"; therefore God would humble them. Their lands would be ruined. Their idols would prove powerless.

Egypt is next on the list (v. 12), and he promises them war that will slay their youths. Assyria and her capital city Nineveh will be so completely destroyed that their land will be a wilderness (vv. 13–15). The wild birds will dwell there with the animals. Their beautiful buildings will be buried under the sands. Nahum had also prophesied the fall of Nineveh and its complete destruction.

Again, Zephaniah closes this message with an appeal to his own people (3:1–7). If God judges the sins of the heathen, how much more will He judge the sins of Judah, the "holy nation of God"? He calls Jerusalem filthy and polluted—yet Josiah had removed all the idols. God could see their hearts, and in their hearts He saw rebellion. They had no real faith in the Lord. The princes and judges were like prowling animals, seeking someone to devour. The prophets were "light"; they lacked seriousness of thought and concern. They were also "treacherous," because they led the people astray. The priests polluted whatever they touched, including the holy sanctuary. They could see God's judgment day after day, but they did not take it to heart. They saw Him punish other nations, but they said, "It will never happen here."

Well, it did happen there. In 606 B.C. the Babylonians came and destroyed the nation, the city, and the temple. "Sin is a reproach to any people"—especially the people of God.

III. God Will Restore His People (3:8–20)

Zephaniah closes his message with a great promise: God will one day regather His people, punish the Gentile nations, and restore Israel and Judah to their land. Verse 8 is certainly a prediction of the Battle of Armageddon, when all nations shall gather against Jerusalem in the last days (Rev. 19:11–21). But Jesus Christ will return and judge these nations, and then establish His kingdom. He will regather the scattered Jews, cleanse them of their sins, and establish His righteous kingdom, sitting upon David's throne in Jerusalem. See Zech. 12–13.

Have you noticed Zephaniah's emphasis on "the remnant"? (2:7, 9; 3:13) In his day, there was a believing remnant, a small group of people faithful to the Lord, just as there is a believing remnant today. In the last days, not every Jew will follow the Lord, but the remnant will.

What were the believing Jews to do because of Zephaniah's message? For one thing, they were to wait (3:8) and let God work out His purposes. Then, they were to sing (3:14ff) and rejoice at the goodness of the Lord. The nation would have to go through a time of trial and testing, but God would be in the midst of her (3:17) and she would not have to fear even in the time of judgment. God would love them and care for them. Then, when His wrath had been ended, He would restore the nation and rejoice

over them. He would afflict those who had afflicted the Jews (3:19) and would bring the Jews back to their land. This happened after the seventy years of captivity ended. But there is a future regathering and restoration for Israel when, according to v. 20, they will be a praise to all the earth. That has not happened. Today they are a source of international contention. But when Jesus returns, they will be the source of joy and glory in the earth, and the world will be at peace.

Haggai

In order to understand the work of the last three prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), we must review Jewish history. In 536, Ezra took about 50,000 Jews and returned to the Holy Land. They rebuilt the altar and started the sacrifices again, and in 535 the foundation was laid for the temple. But there was considerable opposition and the work stopped. It was not until 520 that the people took up the work again; and in 515 the temple was finally completed. It was the work of four godly men that finally brought the task to completion: Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; and Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets. See Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

The purpose of Haggai's ministry was to awaken the lazy people and encourage them in finishing God's temple. It was easy to get the work started when they first arrived in the Holy Land because everyone was dedicated and enthusiastic. But after months of trial and opposition, the work lagged and finally stopped. In this little book we have four sermons from Haggai, and each one of them has a specific date. In each message, Haggai points out a particular sin that will keep us from accomplishing God's will and finishing His work.

I. Putting Self Ahead of the Lord (1:1–15)

It was on September 1, 520, that Haggai delivered this message. Sixteen years had passed since the laying of the foundation, and the temple lay unfinished. This message was delivered to the two leaders of the nation, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil ruler and the religious leader. Haggai does not waste any time; he gets right to the point of his message: "The people are making excuses and neglecting God's house. But it is time to get to work and finish the house of God."

He points out their selfishness: they had built their own houses, but they said it was not time to build God's house. In other words, they were putting self ahead of the Lord. Some of the Jews even had "ceiled houses," which would be luxuries in that day. This sin is with us today, putting our own desires ahead of the will of the Lord. How easy it is to make excuses for not doing God's work! The weather is too bad to go visiting or to attend church, but not too bad for a hunting trip or a shopping spree. People will sit through a double header baseball game and never complain, yet they start to fidget if a church service runs five minutes overtime.

Haggai warns us that we really lose out when we put ourselves ahead of God. In 1:6 he tells us that our earnings vanish away and our possessions fail to last when God is

left out. God held back the rain (v. 10), and for this reason the crops failed (v. 11). After all, the Jews knew God's promise that He would bless their land if they honored Him (see Deut. 28), but they did not trust His Word, so they lost the blessing. Matthew 6:33 is a great promise to claim; so is Phil. 4:19.

The message was received with real conviction (vv. 12–15), and the leaders became stirred to do God's will. "I am with you," promised the Lord. "I will be glorified." Note that the whole enterprise was a spiritual venture and not merely a work of the flesh. God's people rose up and put the Lord first in their lives.

II. Looking Back Instead of Looking Ahead (2:1–9)

The people had been working about seven weeks when Haggai preached his second sermon on October 21, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34). It was supposed to be a great day of joy and praise, but instead it was a day of discouragement and complaining. Why? Because the people were looking back instead of looking ahead. When they had laid the foundation sixteen years before, the older men had wept because they remembered the glory of Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:12); and now some of the people were discouraged because the new temple lacked splendor and glory.

Of course, the plight of the people was due to their sins, but this was still no reason for looking back. In God's work, we must look ahead in faith. "Be strong and fear not!" God said to the discouraged leaders. "I am going to shake this world and one day establish my kingdom." See Heb. 12:26–29. God promises that the glory of the latter house (the temple during the millennial kingdom) will far exceed the glory of the former house (Solomon's temple). "And there I will give peace." The best is yet to come.

III. Failing to Confess Our Sins (2:10–19)

The people expected material blessings the very day they began to work on the temple, but here it was December 24 and things were still difficult. Haggai explained why God had not yet blessed them: they were still unclean; they had not confessed their sins. "You cannot give someone your holiness or health," he explained, "but you can give someone your uncleanness and sickness." And because the people were unclean, their work was unclean (v. 14). Read Zech. 3 in connection with this message; Zechariah had preached his message in the eighth month of the same year (Zech. 1:1), just one month before Hag. 2:10–19. God was able to cleanse the people of their sins, if only they would repent.

Once the nation had been cleansed, God promised to bless them (v. 19). It is not enough to do God's work; we must do it with clean hands and a pure heart. Unconfessed sin is one of the greatest obstacles to accomplishing the Lord's work.

IV. Unbelief (2:20–23)

This final message, preached the same day as the third message, was directed to the governor personally. No doubt Zerubbabel needed special encouragement as he directed the work of the Lord. Satan always attacks spiritual leaders, and it is our duty to

pray for them and work with them. Perhaps Zerubbabel saw the great empires around him and feared for the future of the tiny remnant of Jews. Circumstances have a way of discouraging us as we seek to build the work of the Lord.

But God encouraged the governor's faith. Unbelief always robs us of God's blessings. "I will shake the heavens and the earth," God said. "Don't be afraid of these kingdoms. I will overthrow them and destroy them. As for you, Zerubbabel, you are as a signet, a very precious jewel, to Me. I have chosen you—don't give up." How this message must have encouraged the governor and strengthened his faith.

Zerubbabel was an ancestor of Jesus Christ; his name is listed in the genealogies (see Matt. 1:12 and Luke 3:27). Zerubbabel is an OT type or illustration of Christ. Here Christ is seen as God's chosen signet, His precious seal. A signet speaks of authority and honor. God gave Zerubbabel authority to finish the temple; God gave His Son authority to save the lost and build His temple, the church (John 17:1–3).

What work is it God has called you to do before Christ returns? Have you started it but not finished it? Are you discouraged? Then beware of these sins that hinder the work of the Lord: putting self ahead of God; looking back instead of ahead; unconfessed sin; unbelief. But notice the wonderful promises God gives us: "I am with you" (1:13); "Fear not" (2:5); "I will bless you" (2:19); "I have chosen you" (2:23). Claim the promise of Phil. 1:6 and rise up and do the work of the Lord!

Zechariah

A Suggested Outline of Zechariah

Introduction: A call to repentance— 1:1–6 (November, 520 B.C.)

- I. Eight Visions of Encouragement (1:7–6:15) (Feb. 24, 520)
 - A. The rider (1:7–17)—God has not forgotten Jerusalem
 - B. The craftsmen (1:18–21)—God will destroy her enemies
 - C. The surveyor (2:1–13)—Jerusalem will be restored
 - D. Joshua the high priest (3:1–10)—A cleansed nation
 - E. The candlestick (4:1–14)—God's power enables them
 - F. The flying roll (5:1–4)—Sin will be judged in the land
 - G. The woman (5:5–11)—Wickedness carried to Babylon
 - H. The war chariots (6:1–8)—God controls the nations

Crowning the Priest-King (6:9–15)—The climax of God's plan will be the crowning of Jesus Christ as Priest-King. Israel never had a priest-king, only kings and priests. This can only be a picture of Jesus Christ ...

Interlude: Questions about the fasts (7–8) (Dec. 4, 518)

- II. Two Oracles of Enlightenment (9–14)
 - A. The first oracle (9–11)
 - 1. Conquest of Alexander the Great (9:1–8)
Coming of Messiah (9:9)
 - 2. Victories of the Maccabees (9:11–17)
Coming of Messiah (10)
 - 3. Conquest of Rome (11:1–9)
Coming of Messiah (11:10–14)
Coming of Antichrist (11:15–17)
 - B. The second oracle (12–14)
 - 1. Israel in the Tribulation (12:1–9)
Return of Christ (12:10–13:9)
 - 2. Battle of Armageddon (14:1–3)
Return of Christ (14:4–7)
 - 3. Establishment of the Kingdom (14:8–21)

Introductory Notes to Zechariah

I. The Writer

Zechariah ministered with Haggai during the difficult days when 50,000 Jews had returned to Palestine to reestablish their city and their temple worship. The remnant went back in 536 B.C. and laid the foundations for the temple in 535, but opposition arose and the work stopped. In 530, the Lord raised up Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the leaders and the people, and in 525 they finished the work. Zechariah was both a prophet and a priest (see Neh. 12:4, 16), and from Zech. 2:4 we discover that he was a young man. His name means "Jehovah remembers." His father's name means "Jehovah blesses," and his grandfather's name means "His time." Put them together and you have "Jehovah remembers to bless in His time."

II. Theme

This book ranks next to Daniel as an OT unveiling of God's plan for the Jews. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned over forty times in Zechariah. In Zech. 1:14–17 you have the key verses of the book: God is jealous for Jerusalem; He will punish the heathen for what they did to His city; and He will one day restore the city in glory and peace. The fact that God has chosen Jerusalem in His grace is often mentioned in this book (1:17;

2:12; 3:2). He will have mercy on the city (1:12) and will one day dwell in the city (8:3, 8).

III. Interpretation

As with most OT prophecy, we must distinguish between the near and the distant meanings of what Zechariah says. In one verse he will be describing the fall of Jerusalem under the Romans, and in the next verse he will picture the coming of Messiah to reign. Zechariah's favorite name for God is "Lord of Hosts"—the Lord of the armies. He sees the Lord coming to defeat Israel's enemies and establish Jerusalem in peace and glory. To interpret these magnificent prophecies as referring to the church today is to rob this book of meaning and power. Certainly there are spiritual applications for all ages, but the basic interpretation must be for the Jewish nation and Jerusalem.

IV. The Book

As you will see from the suggested outline, the book is divided into three parts. In chapters 1–6, the prophet describes eight visions, all of which summarize the message of the book: Jerusalem shall be delivered, cleansed, and reestablished in peace and prosperity. The section closes with the crowning of Joshua as king-priest, certainly a picture of Jesus Christ.

Chapters 7–8 are the record of a visit from some Jews to ask about their fasts in commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem. This fast was in the fifth month (2 Kings 25:8; Jer. 52:12). There is a question. If Jerusalem is going to be rebuilt, why continue the fast? Zechariah replies that their fasting ought to be from the heart and not from the calendar, and he promises that in the glorified city, their fasts will be turned into feasts.

The final section (9–14) is a description of Jerusalem and God's victory over the Gentile nations. In 9–11 we have the first "burden," and in 12–14 the second. As you can see from the outline, Zechariah deals with the invasion of Alexander the Great, the time of the Maccabees (Jewish patriots who delivered Israel from bondage for a brief time), and even the fall of Jerusalem under the Romans. Zechariah also leaps to the "latter days" to show us the Battle of Armageddon, the return of Christ to earth, and the establishing of the kingdom.

IV. Christ

Zechariah shows us Jesus Christ in many aspects of His ministry: the King (9:9; Matt. 21:4–5); the Stone (3:9; 10:4; Rom. 9:31–33); the Slave sold for thirty pieces of silver (11:12; Matt. 27:3–10); the smitten Shepherd (13:7; Matt. 26:31); the Branch (3:8, 6:12; see Isa. 4:2, 11:1; Jer. 23:5, 33:15); the glorious Ruler (14:1–4, 9, 16–17).

Zechariah

The city of Jerusalem is frequently in the news these days, and people are asking, "What is the future of this ancient city? Can the Jews hold Jerusalem? Will it be attacked again?" The answers to these and many more questions are found in the Book of Zechariah. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned forty-two times in this book. In 1:12–17, God makes it clear that He is in control of the destiny of the city: "I will have mercy. I am jealous for Jerusalem. My house shall be built. The Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem."

Zechariah prophesied at a time when Jerusalem was still in ruins. In 586 the Babylonians had destroyed the city and had taken the people captive to Babylon. In 536, after the fall of Babylon, Cyrus permitted a remnant of the Jews to return to their land, and in 535 they laid the foundation for the temple. But the work stopped, and it was not until 520 that the Jews again began to rebuild God's house. This was under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. But Zechariah did not see a weak nation in a ruined city; he looked down the centuries and saw the future of the city and the coming of Jerusalem's King, the Messiah. He knew the temple would be rebuilt (1:16; 4:9; 6:12–14; 8:9). Trace in Zechariah the great events related to the city of Jerusalem.

I. Protected by the Lord (9:8)

In 9:1–8, the prophet describes the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Greek general. History tells us that Alexander destroyed many cities, but not Jerusalem. He threatened the city but never carried out his threats. Before the general arrived, the Jewish high priest had a dream which he felt was from God, and in the dream he was told to dress in his robes and meet Alexander outside the city. With him went the priests in their white robes. The scene dazzled Alexander. In fact, he claimed that he too had dreamed of this very scene. Alexander entered Jerusalem peacefully and never harmed the people or the city in any way.

II. Visited by the Messiah (9:9)

Perhaps Zechariah saw in Alexander's visit a small foregleam of the coming of Jesus Christ to the holy city, for in the very next verse (9:9) he predicts Christ's arrival in Jerusalem. This was fulfilled on "Palm Sunday" when Jesus rode into the city (Matt. 21:4–5; John 12:12–16). Alexander came for war; Jesus came with peace. How did they treat Him? Zechariah 13:7 tells us He was to be arrested (Matt. 26:31) and smitten. He was sold for the price of a slave (Zech. 11:12; Matt. 27:3–10). The result: He was wounded in the house of His friends (Zech. 13:6) and pierced on the cross (Zech. 12:10). What a tragedy that the "City of Peace" should reject her "Prince of Peace" and crucify Him.

III. Destroyed by Rome (11:1–14)

The entire section is a graphic picture of the last days of Jerusalem and her destruction by the Roman armies, announced 600 years before it occurred. Zechariah sees the land spoiled; he hears the howling of the people. What caused this tragedy? The unfaithfulness of the rulers (shepherds). The religious leaders of the people rejected the truth and permitted their own Messiah to be crucified. Israel had been “God’s people, the sheep of His pasture,” but now they were a “flock of slaughter” (vv. 4, 7), destined to be slaughtered by Rome. Zechariah here pictures the Messiah as He uses the two staves of the shepherd (Ps. 23:4), one called *Grace* (Beauty) and the other *Union* (Bands). When Israel sold her Messiah (v. 12), then God’s day of grace was about to come to an end for the nation. No longer was she united in the Lord; the nation would have to be broken. In A.D. 70 Rome invaded Israel and Jerusalem was destroyed. See Matt. 23:37–39.

IV. Protected by Antichrist (11:15–17)

The flock of Israel rejected their true Shepherd and smote Him (13:7), but they accepted the false shepherd, the “idol shepherd”—Antichrist. Jesus predicted this in John 5:43. Daniel 9:27 tells us that after the church has been raptured, the leader of Federated Europe (the ten kingdoms of Dan. 7:7–8) will make a covenant with the Jews to protect them for seven years. Jerusalem will have three and a half years of peace, a false peace that will be the prelude to three and a half years of awful tribulation. During those first three and a half years, the two witnesses of Rev. 11:1ff will be giving God’s message; and Rev. 11:4 relates them to the two olive trees of Zech. 4. In Zechariah’s day, the two olive trees represented Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor, through whom the Spirit was working. But the final application is to the two witnesses in the last days.

V. Attacked by the Gentiles (12:1–8; 14:1–3)

Jerusalem has gone through many attacks and desolations, but one more remains. During the Tribulation days (the last three and a half years), only one-third of the nation will survive to enter the kingdom (Zech. 13:8–9). Note the repetition of “in that day” at least thirteen times in Zech. 12–14, referring to the Day of the Lord. In 12:1–8 and 14:1–2, we see all the Gentile nations gathered together against Jerusalem. The Antichrist has moved into Jerusalem, broken his covenant with the Jews, and made the temple his headquarters for worldwide worship. See 2 Thes. 2 and Rev. 13. During the last half of the Tribulation, the kings of the earth will begin to assemble for that great final battle, the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12–16; 19:19–21). Note in Zech. 14:1–2 that Jerusalem does suffer terribly in this battle before the Lord returns to deliver her. Some teachers refer this passage to the Battle of Gog and Magog, Ezek. 38–39, but this does not seem consistent. Gog and Magog is in the middle of the Tribulation. The battle in Zech. 14, like Armageddon, involves all Gentile nations. Furthermore, Christ does not return after the Battle of Gog and Magog to deliver Jerusalem, as He does here in Zech. 14:4ff.

VI. Delivered by Jesus Christ (12:9–14:11)

Just when the battle is at its worst, Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives (14:4). This will fulfill the promise of Acts 1:11–12. The glory had departed from Olivet (Ezek. 11:22–23) and will return from Olivet (Ezek. 43:2). An earthquake will change the topography of the area. See Micah 1:4, Nahum 1:5, and note Rev. 16:18–19. This change will undoubtedly make possible the new landscape required by Ezekiel's magnificent temple (Ezek. 40–48), since the present arrangement would make so large a structure impossible. The newly formed valley will also make a way to escape for the people in Jerusalem, but the final victory will be Christ's (Rev. 19:11–21).

VII. Cleansed and Glorified by the Lord (12:10–13:1; 14:9–21)

The nation will look upon the Pierced One (12:10; John 19:37; Rev. 1:7) and will repent of her sins and mourn. God will open His gracious fountain and cleanse them of their sins. Note the specific groups of people who will repent (12:12–14): David (royalty), Nathan (the prophets), Levi (the priests). Throughout Israel's history, it has been the prophets, priests, and kings who often led the people astray.

The glorious temple will be established by the Branch (6:12–13), and Christ the King-Priest shall reign in majesty and peace. "Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (14:11) for the first time in history. The glorious living waters will flow out to heal the land (14:8 and Ezek. 47:1ff). The Gentile nations will worship at Jerusalem (14:16ff), and holiness will characterize the city that Zeph. 3:1 calls "filthy." The cleansing of Zech. 3 will be a reality, and there will be peace in the world. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6). For when Jerusalem has peace, there will be peace among all nations.

Malachi

We know very little about this next to the last of the OT prophets (John the Baptist was the last—Mal. 3:1 and 4:5–6 with Matt. 11:10–15, Mark 1:2, and Luke 1:17). He ministered to the restored Jewish nation about 400 years before Christ. The sins described in this book are found in Neh. 13:10–30. Malachi directs his first message to the priests, and then he turns to the people collectively—"Like people, like priest." As the prophet delivers God's Word, the people respond by arguing. Note the repeated "Wherein?" (1:2, 6–7; 2:17; 3:7–8, 13). It is a dangerous thing when people argue with God and try to defend their sinful ways.

Malachi points out the terrible sins of the people and the priests.

I. They Doubted His Love (1:1–5)

"I have loved you," God says to His people. "Oh?" they respond. "Wherein have You loved us? Prove it." Doubting God's love is the beginning of unbelief and disobedience. Eve doubted God's love and ate of the forbidden tree; she thought God was holding out on her. Satan wants us to feel neglected by God. "Look at your difficult circumstances,"

he said to the Jewish remnant. "Where are the crops? Why doesn't God take care of you?"

God proves His love to His people in two ways: (1) He graciously chose Jacob, their father, and rejected Esau, who in many ways was a much better man; and (2) He judged the Edomites (Esau's descendants) and gave to Israel the best of the lands. He promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, but, alas, their sins polluted the land. Even then, he graciously restored them to their land and delivered them from captivity.

II. They Despised His Name (1:6–14)

Now God turns to the priests, who should have been the spiritual leaders of the land. The priests were not giving honor to God's name; they were taking the best for themselves. They did not value the spiritual privileges God gave them: serving at the altar, burning the incense, and eating the dedicated showbread. And they did not bring their best for the sacrifices: they brought the poorest of the animals (cf. Deut. 15:21). God gave them His very best, and He asked for their best in return, but they would not obey Him.

Verse 10 ought to read: "Who is there spiritual enough to shut the temple doors and put an end to this hypocrisy?" God would rather see the temple closed than to have the people and the priests "playing at religion" and keeping the best for themselves. The priests would not even accept a sacrifice until they had first gotten their share. It was this kind of sin that brought defeat to Israel back in Eli's day (1 Sam. 2:12–17 and 4:1–18). Verse 11 states that the "heathen Gentiles" were offering better sacrifices to the Lord than were His own people. It is too bad when unsaved people sacrifice more for their religion than do those of us who truly know the Lord.

We are priests through Christ, and we too are to bring "spiritual sacrifices" to Him (1 Peter 2:5). What are these sacrifices? Our bodies (Rom. 12:1–2); our offerings (Phil. 4:14–18); praise (Heb. 13:15); good works (Heb. 13:16); souls we have won to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Are we bringing Him our best—or only what is convenient for us?

III. They Defiled His Covenant (2:1–17)

It was no light thing to be a priest, for this was a gracious gift of God through His covenant with Levi. Verses 5–7 describe the ideal priest: he fears the Lord and obeys Him; he receives the Word and teaches it; he lives what he teaches; he seeks to turn others from sin. But the priests in Malachi's day actually led people astray (2:8) and defiled the holy covenant.

What would God do to them? "I will curse your blessings." This ties in with 3:9 and the lack of tithes and offerings. God cursed the crops; the people were poor; they did not bring the offerings to the priests; therefore the priests went hungry. In sinning against God's covenant they were only hurting themselves. But vv. 10–16 point out another terrible sin of the priests: they divorced their Jewish wives and married heathen women. They dealt treacherously against the women and their families; see Ex. 34:10–17, Ezra 9:1–4, Neh. 13:23–31. All their weeping at the altar (2:13) could not change things; they had to put away their sins. Read v. 15 like this: "Did not the Lord make

husband and wife one? Why? That you might bring forth a godly family.” Actually, the nation’s looseness about divorce was endangering the promise of the Seed, Christ. God hates divorce; it is the breaking of the covenant between husband and wife and between them and God.

IV. They Disobeyed His Word (3:1–15)

In 2:17 the people had scornfully asked, “Will God punish us for our sins? Does He really care?” God answers them by promising to send His messenger (John the Baptist) who would announce the Messenger of the covenant (Jesus Christ). Jesus did come into the temple and expose its sins and purify its courts. In His ministry He revealed the sins of the religious leaders, so much so that they finally crucified Him. Of course, there is a future application here when the Day of the Lord refines Israel and separates the true from the false. Why does the Lord not simply do away with His rebellious people? Verse 6 is the answer: He changes not and must be true to His promises (Lam. 3:22).

The people had disobeyed God by robbing Him of tithes and offerings. Actually, when God’s people are not faithful in their giving, they not only rob God, but they also rob themselves. God had shut off the rain and spoiled the crops because of their selfishness. Tithing, of course, is not “making a bargain with God”; but God does promise to bless and care for those who are faithful in their stewardship (Phil. 4:10–19). Certainly God is not bankrupt; He wants our tithes and offerings as expressions of our faith and love. When a believer’s love for Christ grows cold, it usually shows up in the area of stewardship. If every church member would bring the Lord His due (10 percent of the income, the tithe), and then add offerings (as an expression of gratitude), our local churches would have more than enough for their ministries. And they would be able to share generously with the many other good ministries that deserve support.

Malachi closes his message with some wonderful promises to the faithful (3:16–4:6). There was that faithful remnant in this day who did not forsake God’s house, but who met together for mutual blessing (3:16–18; see Heb. 10:25). “They are My jewels,” says the Lord. What a beautiful picture of the faithful believer. Jewels are precious, and we are precious in His sight. He purchased us with His blood. He is polishing us with trials and testings; and one day in glory we shall shine in beauty and splendor.

Christ is pictured as the Sun of Righteousness. To the church, He is the “Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16; 2:28), for He will appear when the hour is darkest to take His church home. But to Israel, He is the Sun, bringing the “Day of the Lord,” a day that will mean burning to the lost, but healing to saved Jews and Gentiles. “Elijah” in 4:5–6 refers to John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13), but it has a reference also to one of the two witnesses spoken of in Rev. 11. The last word in our English OT is “curse.” At the end of the NT we read, “And there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3). The difference? Jesus Christ.