

# **THE MINOR PROPHETS**

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## HOSEA

Hosea's name means He saves. He was the son of Beerli and lived about 780 - 725 BC

Many Christians are fussy about words. Sometimes this may be necessary, but not always.

While the words salvation and redemption has the same resultant meaning, the words are a little different.

This is shown in the book of the prophet Hosea, the first of the twelve Minor Prophets. Minor, not in the sense of less important but, perhaps, in the sense of a shorter ministry.

In Hosea 1 verse 2, the Lord tells Hosea to take a wife of whoredoms who has children of whoredoms.

Now God would not tell a man, let alone a prophet, to marry a woman of ill repute who had illegitimate children. Hosea is recounting events after they have happened. Hosea married a woman who later proved to be unfaithful. Some had said that Gomer was probably, or became, a Temple prostitute.

Hosea married Gomer and in chapter 1 verse 3 we read that she bare him a son.

In verse 6 she has a daughter but not it does not say that she bare him a daughter.

In verse 8, she has a son and, again, it does not say that she bare Hosea a son. These last two children are not Hosea's, but children of Gomer's infidelity. Hosea 3 verse 1 calls her an adulteress.

In Chapter 2 verse 2, Hosea pleads the case of Gomer saying, "She is not my wife; she must put away her whoredoms. She has played the harlot," and in verse 5, "and gone after other lovers and acted shamefully".

To most men that would be the end of it. The Lord Jesus said that a man can divorce his wife for fornication (Matthew 5.32; 19.9) although there are believers who contradict this.

In Hosea 3, God tells Hosea to go and buy Gomer back although she has worshipped other gods, had a drink problem and had many lovers.

And so he does. She cost him 15 pieces of silver and one and a half homers of barley and Gomer had to promise to be faithful to her husband in the future and he would treat her well.

This is a picture of God calling His earthly people back to Himself.,says the Lord.

This is also a picture of the Lord redeeming us. Everyone belongs to God but the majority reject Him. But the Lord came to seek and save those that are lost. He did not pay 15 pieces of silver and a homer and half of barley for us but paid with His life and the shedding of His Precious Blood; a price that we cannot calculate.

It is like depositing an item in a pawnbrokers shop and being without it until you buy it back and redeem it. There are Christians who have owned allegiance to the Lord and gone away from Him and yet the Lord wants to redeem them. It is the story of the one lost sheep of a fold of an hundred.

There is another message here. Hosea forgave Gomer. I don't think I could have. God forgave us. When He died on the Cross all our sins were future. That causes us to rejoice!

Hosea 4 deals with various judgements on Israel each referring to some aspect of Israel's sin; the root cause was not knowing the Lord. Both Hosea and Jeremiah define religion as knowing the Lord (Jeremiah 9.24, 24.7) and it refers to a deep knowledge and nothing superficial. It is one thing to know of the Lord but it is another to know Him personally and obey His Will.

Hosea deals with inward attitudes to the Lord and deals with His kindness and faithfulness. Without these attributes evil will have its way. There is an emphasis on moral standards here which standards are successful if we have the right relationship with God. In verses 4 to 9 Hosea deals with the low standards of the religious leaders of his time who actually encourage people to sin because there would be an increase in income for sin offerings and trespass offerings. It is to be noticed that strong drink and idolatry made many people irrational and sinful. One could consider how these things are prevalent today. Some denominations and speakers have slick methods with entertainment, jokes, pop groups, dancing and talking about self. It may get people into church but not necessarily into heaven. And some of these groups are money making enterprises the detail of which may be concealed.

In chapters 5 and 6 Hosea predicts an invasion of Israel starting in the hilltop towns in which invasion Judah was to be involved as well. The invading armies were God's instruments of moral judgement upon Israel who choose the wrong way out of trouble (5.13). Often we escape from the judgment upon our sin but commit more sins. Chapter 6 talks about Israel in distress because of their being under threat and 6 verses 1 to 3 states their expression of repentance which seems true enough upon first consideration. But mere words cannot fool God who speaks of His mercy. He is not deceived by outward sacrifice (v 6) since religious ritual is not enough.

In Hosea 7 and 8, the prophet uses the symbolism of a baker and saying that the district of Ephraim is half baked. Israel made false alliances. They were at the crossroads of the trade routes and encountered many foreign peoples who influenced them and such compromise is weakness. It can result in half baked faith. Trust in any foreign alliance is an act of disobedience to the Lord.

There were also false gods and rampant idolatry (7.16, 8.4-6) which refers particularly to Jeroboam's images at Dan and Bethel as it states in 1 Kings 12.28 which idolatry was Canaanite worship of Baal the fertility god. Repentance was false while idolatry was rife.

Canaanite worship centred on a calf or bull, and the idolatry of the golden calf of Exodus 32 suggests that the whole of Israel's monarchy from Jeroboam 1 onwards is condemned as was Solomon and his serial idolatry in 1 Kings 11 which split the kingdom into two namely Israel and Judah. Both these evil kings show us the danger of turning away from God and failing to implement His guidance.

Hosea 11 is very moving and said to be the Old Testament equivalent of the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is at Calvary that we see both the mercy and justice of God.

The other contrast is the waywardness of the children of Israel and God's amazing love towards them which we can all speak about in our own lives. Israel was a son to God and He loved them but they sacrificed to Baal and other deities. He showed them His ties of love for them and removed their burdens.

This contradicts the view that the Old Testament portrays God as a tyrant which He is not. He loves His own without compromising His righteousness. He treated Israel with judgement (5- 7) and with mercy (10-11). In verse 12 we read that Judah remained faithful, but within a century failed and received strong condemnation.

Chapter 12 deals further with Israel's sin and, still today, people believe that what we know as sinful attitudes and acts seems to bring security (verse 1), prosperity (verses 7-8) or other goals. Riches

acquired by evil means are condemned by God who will punish (verses 8-9). We must not fool ourselves and think that we can get away with it.

The reference to Jacob is interesting signifying like father like son (verses 2-6). To trample over another is utterly wrong and was apparent from Jacob's birth but he finally met God. It is implied that Israel pursued his immoral way and now were in the death-throes with the oncoming overthrow by the Assyrians.

Hosea 13 typifies Proverbs 14.34, Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to all the people. It says at least two things about idolatry. It degrades (verse 2). The idea of men kissing the calf images expressing their homage and worship was ridiculous to say the least. We have idolatry today but it is harder to detect and idolatry is heresy and practised by some who say that they are Christians. From this we see that idolatry is ingratitude to God and it corrupts. Who would imagine that Israel, so loved and protected by God, would turn away from Him? As for ourselves, we must never forget what we owe to Him (Hebrews 2.3). We reap what we sow and we must constantly look to ourselves

The final chapter tells us that Israel heard Hosea's warning and did nothing. They took no notice. Verse 3 likens us to being helpless and orphans and always being tempted by material things. Israel was relying on foreign alliances, weapons, cavalry and idolatry. Verses 4 to 8 speaks of God's amazing grace. The dew in Palestine is an important source of life-giving moisture hence it speaks symbolically of God-given vitality.

There is a need for true repentance and to return to the Lord which will restore a broken home such as that of Hosea and Gomer, and a broken nation.

In over 50 years, I have heard preaching or ministry on this important book only once with its vital lessons and that was at Keswick.

## JOEL

Of Joel we know nothing and there is no real indication of his dates.

The book begins with a devastating plague of locusts accompanied by a severe drought which speaks of an oncoming judgment. This plague will destroy all plant life. There will consequently be no harvest and the cattle and sheep will suffer as there will be no food for them (1.16) and the prophet takes this coming plague as a warning from God (1.15). Even the wine will fail (1.7) and the drunkards will complain (1.5). There will also be a strong nation, very large in numbers, who will invade the land just as the locusts, caterpillars and cankerworm had. But this time it will not be plant life that will suffer but human life. It is interesting to note that at the time of these two invasions worship was not considered important by the Jews (1.13) and the elders are told that they must come before the Lord in a solemn assembly and cry to the Lord (1.14).

Sanctification and holiness was the order of that day, as it is today. and it is also true that when worship is not real and not in accordance with God's will, the church and its witness is seriously damaged.

We read that judgment begins at the house of God. As Christians, we must ensure that we hold fast to the truth and maintain worthy fellowship with all our members without jealousy, gossip and back biting. We must elevate the Lord Jesus and not preach or talk about ourselves (2 Corinthians 4. 5). The prevalent emphasis in many churches today is on self promotion and personal testimonies and this is not helpful since when we are saved the past is to be remembered no more.

The situation in Joel's time is that there would be great lamentation likened to a widow mourning the husband of her youth (1.8). We are dealing with overwhelming grief here. The priests mourn because they cannot perform the various offerings since animals and plant life is destroyed. Farmers are in a similar situation because the grain and the wine are destroyed (1.11) as have the fruit trees including the fig, pomegranate, palm and apple trees.

It is time to dress in sackcloth and fast and to respond to the call for repentance (1.14-15) although God does not want garments rent but hearts.

A comment on verses 2 and 3 is apt. Elders were to pass on knowledge to succeeding generations (Exodus 10.2, Deuteronomy 4.9 etc.) and the calamity of the plague was so severe that it has been recounted for future generations. Swarms of locusts can extend to 500 miles and some have covered 2,000 square miles.

The situation is so utterly serious (1.16-18). The animals are crying and groaning as they starved and slowly died. Famine was rife as crops died before the people's eyes. The water streams had dried up and a forest fire swept through the land (1.19-20). Calamity follows after calamity. We cannot be sure that these disasters were God's punishments or His method of driving His people back to Himself, although He sometimes does this by using trials and difficulties to reach us so that we come back to Him and, when we do, there is always blessing.

Chapter 2 begins with identifying that the message of coming doom is addressed to Judah and, as you know, Zion is another name for Jerusalem. There is to be a general alarm and the sounding of a trumpet for the day of the Lord is coming. We must understand that the day of the Lord is an expression often used for a day of judgment. When we come to the end times and that great day of the Lord which is after the church has been raptured (1 Thessalonians 4. 13ff) and the following great tribulation ends with Lord coming to the earth in power and great glory and, after defeating His enemies, He will set up His millennial reign.

But although this is referred to later in this chapter, the day of the Lord that was imminent for Joel's time was to be a day of darkness and unmitigating gloom. The invaders are a great and powerful nation and their like has not been seen before nor will they be seen in succeeding generations.

The people had seen the plague of locusts and the devastation it brought. The swarm of locusts had the sunshine of the dawn shining on their wings but now the dawn will break on a rapacious army to kill and destroy. The locusts had ravaged the land as a forest fire would and did. Before the locusts and the army attacks, the land would have been as the Garden of Eden but afterwards it would be a wilderness. This may be an exaggerated comparison but the point is made. There is the thunderous clatter of horses and chariots and the battle is about to take place. Just the sight of the warriors advancing with warlike faces made the Jews tremble and their own faces were pale with shock. They were not afraid; they were terrified. (2.3-6).

The next three verses have Jerusalem invaded and we read of the discipline of the army since they do not break ranks. Jewish weapons were no match for the conquerors. There was death on both sides and bodies were cremated straightaway as the historians point out was the custom.

The locust invasion was accompanied by an earthquake and a great storm and it would appear that both the earth and the heavens trembled and now, in verse 12, we read of both the earth and the heavens trembling again.

It will be said again and again that God is righteous. He cannot look at sin. He has always shown grace, mercy and longsuffering but when there is no response and the people abandon both Him and His goodness and choose to sin and rebel against Him then He must act. Judgment is His strange work and He takes no delight in the death of the wicked or even the punishment of the wicked.

He now calls upon His people to repent (2. 12-14). Repentance is not saying sorry but reviewing the situation thoroughly and being genuinely contrite realising your offences and how they have caused God to be angry at our sin. We must remember that the Lord Jesus went to the Cross because of our sin and died that we might live. In view of this and what He has done, we should love and honour Him and avoid sin.

The prophet says that the people must return to the Lord with their whole heart with clear and willing display of true repentance. The practise of tearing your clothes to show repentance was no longer valid since the heart had to be rent.

Repentance was not to be an outward show but an internal life-changing matter.

The Lord is gracious, slow to anger and full of kindness. He may change His plans. Because of Judah's sin they were estranged from the Lord. He wants them back, such is His love for them. He had been deprived of the offerings and the worship due to Him as well as enduring the continual sin of the people. The people's severance from the Lord weighed heavily on the Lord's heart and, in our day, we should realise that the Lord Himself wants fellowship with us. Because of many changes in society there is, in some churches and assemblies, small congregations and often they may feel dejected but where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord He is there and that to bless (Matthew 18.20). We may not always appreciate this.

A solemn assembly is called for (2. 15-17) and the shophar which had been blown to warn of the approaching enemy now this cow's horn is to be blown by the priests for the people to attend this solemn assembly. All were to attend including children and babies. The meeting was more important than a planned wedding.

Jealousy is given a bad name but when you see someone you want to protect them because of your love for them and true love will not accept any rival. The prophet asks the question as to what other nations will say about the Jews and taunt them saying, Where is your God?

While we do not want to use the term property to describe God's property, the Jews were His people and the Temple was His as well. It was God's house.

Are there churches today, which are houses of and for God, which are being used for secular things from jumble sales to political meetings?

It is a common taunt today about the character of God and His people. If God is a god of love why does He allow this? Why does He not do something about this? Why is He allowing so much suffering?

All these comments make God out to be responsible for all such matters.

And when people say, Why doesn't God do something about it? We look at the Cross and say, He has!

The thrust of these verses is that God wants to care for His people but, as any father would, He sometimes has to correct and discipline them. He could not allow His people to continue in sin or that any heathen nation could gain the upper hand.

Divine jealousy is shown in 2.18-19. He had compassion for His land and would send grain, wine and oil which would satisfy them and His people would no longer be a reproach to the nations. Whatever people may say about God and some also criticise Him, He constantly shows His care. And any change of heart towards His people is in response to their change of heart towards Him.

The northerners will be driven into desolation and because of the great evil they have done they will become as a stench (v 20) and the next two verses speak of Jewish fear turning into joy and restoration not only of the people but the ground which shall again bear fruit.

This reminds us of the glorious verses in Psalm 103 about the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Verses such as He will not always chide neither will He keep His anger for ever. His desire is for the welfare and lasting happiness of His people and, in our day, we recall that the Lord's will is that all should come to a knowledge of all the truth and that we might have abundant and meaningful lives (John 10.10).

This abundance is also in verses 23 and 24. After the drought, the rains have come and food and drink supplies will now be plentiful and the following two verses talk about a complete restoration and that the people will realise that He God is the only God and they will praise Him for all His wonderful acts and will know and acknowledge the goodness of God. He does not want His people ever to be put to shame again but it is human sin that causes the shame. The years that the locusts have eaten and the other tribulations that have come will all change into joy and prosperity.

And it is true for us. The closer we are to the Lord the more satisfied we shall be. Many of us can testify to this and compare the times when we were not close. If we honour God more, He will respond accordingly.

We now come to the most familiar passage of this prophecy which so many misinterpret.

Joel 2 28-29 reads

It shall be that afterwards I will pour out on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Also upon your manservants and maidservants in those days will I pour out my Spirit.

Elim and other Pentecostal and charismatic meetings believe and assert that this prophecy refers to them and justifies their doctrines including their speaking in tongues, prophesying and women taking audible part in meetings and worship.

What they fail to realise is that this prophecy was initially addressed exclusively to Jews and that the outpouring of blessing was to be on ALL flesh not just Pentecostals and charismatics some of whom claim that only they have the full gospel and therefore are superior. However, there are some who believe that all flesh refers to more than just the Jews.

The prophet is solely concerned with the southern kingdom of Judah. Nowhere is this more clear than in chapter two of Joel's prophecy

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion that is to say Jerusalem (verse 1).

The Lord is with the army (verse 11). Chapter 1 verse 6 talks of a nation that is to invade the land of His people

The Lord will have pity on His people, the Jews (verse 18) and calls them to repentance (verse 13).

The Lord will restore His people to prosperity (2. 23ff) and after this God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh and that means all Jews (verse 28). The great outpouring of the Spirit, to which Joel refers, is upon the nation of Israel (Ezekiel 39.29). God's people remain the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2. 8).

Wonders will be shown in the heavens (verse 30) including the moon being turned to blood. Verse 10 talks of the earth shaking and even the heavens trembling and the sun and stars becoming dark. Surely this refers to the last days, often called the day of the Lord, as indicated in Revelation in 6.12. Revelation 19 tells us of the Lord going forth to war with His army and Revelation chapter 20 verse 2 talks of Satan being bound for a millennium and speaks of the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth in Jerusalem among His people. All this ties up with Joel chapter 2. Consider also Jude 14 and 15.

As Satan will be bound for a thousand years, there will be a millennium of peace. Isaiah 11.6ff also refers to peace in the animal kingdom.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatlings together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed together; their young ones shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

There has never been a time like this but there will be in the millennium.

It is frequently claimed that the apostle Peter said that the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2.16 ff.) but the accompanying details which Peter quoted were not, of course, fulfilled at Pentecost. The last days were not at Pentecost. The sun and moon were not darkened nor the moon turned to blood or the wonders appeared in the heavens of blood, fire and vapours of smoke. The things would happen before the great and terrible day of the Lord. (verses 30 and 31)

Christendom is full of people who wrongly interpret parts of the Bible. They may be sincere but are sometimes sincerely wrong. It may not be our place to correct them but simply to explain what is evidenced as the true interpretation.

The final verse of this chapter (verse 32) triumphantly proclaims that salvation is in God. As in Obadiah 17, many will escape the judgment and all who call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered just as in this day of grace all who call upon the Lord Jesus shall be saved. Whosoever will may come. While many do not come to the Lord, those who do shall be saved. It has been rightly said that those who are caught up at the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 will escape the great tribulation.

As with other minor prophets such as Habakkuk and Zephaniah, Joel also has three chapters dealing with the sins of the people, a call to repentance and a restoration.

Chapter 3 of Joel begins with the day of reckoning when the nations, who have been enemies of the Jews, will be brought into the valley of Jehoshaphat to be judged by God for what they have done to His people and reference is made as to how the

Jews have been scattered. Historically, this valley of Jehoshaphat event has not yet happened and these verses follows on from the last day prophecies in the preceding chapter and must refer to the second coming. This judgment of the nations comes at the end of the great tribulation with the coming of Christ to the earth in great glory to deliver His people which ties up with Zechariah 12 8ff, 14.3 and Revelation 19, 11-21. All the days of their darkness and persecution will be turned into light. In Matthew 25 31-46 we read that when the Son of Man comes in great glory He will assemble all nations together before Him for judgment which will be assessed on how they have treated the Jews. There will be blessings for those nations that have treated the Jews well and those who have persecuted them will be cast into hell. There is a reference to boys and girls sold to be slaves or for immoral purposes. A boy would be sold for a night with a prostitute and a girl for a drink of wine.

God has to deal with these affronts and Joel goes on to say that He will also deal with the Gentiles. In verses 4 and 5, He mentions Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines who had stolen the treasure of the Temple to put in their own pagan temples with their lifeless and useless idols.

The next two verses talk about the slave market and how God will do to these evil nations what they have done to the Jews. Many Jewish people were sold as slaves to the heathens in Greece.

Verses 9 and 10 speaks again of the judgment of the nations with a proclamation of war and these Gentile nations are to prepare for war. The nations of the north are involved, (Daniel 11. 44ff), Revelation 16.12 suggest the armies of the far east and Daniel 2. 35, 44 and 7.26 state western powers being there. This refers to the final military outburst at the end of the great tribulation and prior to the coming in great glory. And there will be a great judgment says verse 11 and 12. The Lord is now sitting to pass sentence. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe for the wickedness of the nations is great and there will be multitudes in the valley of decision (verses 13 and 14) Evil cannot go unchecked for ever. There will the Lord inevitably crush His foes.

Verses 15 and 16 refers again to the celestial disturbances with the sun and the moon darkened and the thunderous sound of God's voice upon the evil nations and His reassuring voice to His own He will be a stronghold and a refuge to His people.

These verses may refer to a dreadful storm convulsed by a fearsome earthquake. Truly this day of the Lord will be terrifying. At this time, the Jews will be protected. The Lord was known in the early history of His people and now they will know Him, love Him and admire Him and He is worthy. He will stand on the Holy Mount and rule in Jerusalem which will also be holy. Strangers have trodden its streets for centuries as invaders, but no more and, in the millennial reign, Satan is bound and there

is peace. Blessings will abound and this is reinforced in Verse 18. The land will be fertile and prosperous no longer torn by strife and conflict. When we think of all the suffering of the Jews (sometimes, but not always, brought upon them by themselves) but this unfair suffering particularly in the 1930s and 1940s and, indeed, since then must also be considered. They are certainly going to be seen as the apple of God's eye and all the world will know it. It will also be the end of awful anti-Semitism.

The enemies of the Jews will have desolate lands such as Egypt and Edom. No nation that sets themselves up against God or His people will prosper. Divine punishment will be severe on those who have shed innocent Jewish blood. Ezekiel 29.9 prophesied the time when Egypt would be desolate and waste.

Judah and the Jews shall live in peace when the Lord dwells in Jerusalem.

For the Christian there is blessing. They have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, received their rewards at the Judgement Seat of Christ, feasted at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and, we read, will judge the nations.

Times may be tough now for Christians as well as for Jews but the ultimate result is victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ.

# AMOS

## Introduction and Chapter One

One hesitates to write about this prophet in the light of Alec Motyer's excellent book on Amos.

Amos was a herdsman from Tekoa in Judea who prophesied against the northern kingdom of Israel. His message was of Divine justice and righteousness and impending judgment upon those who did not meet the basic standards required by God. This prophet would make annual visits to the north to sell the wool he had grown and would have mixed with many traders. He would also have met the peasants and the arrogant aristocracy, the conceited women who lived in luxury and the ruthless husbands, the religious people who used sacred places for sexual debauchery. God's moral standards were not being kept and, consequently, judgment would follow.

The name Amos means a bearer of burdens. Unlike some modern Christians, he says little of himself. He was a man of the wilderness and would know the ways of insects, snakes, lions and bears. His powers of observation would be second to none and he would easily see the state of things in Israel.

Amos must not be considered as to being a peasant farmer. He was very intelligent and his writings show a skill and coherence.

The date of this prophecy was in the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel and the period would be about 782 BC to 745 BC. The prophets Hosea and Jeremiah quote from Amos who was a contemporary of Joel.

In verse 2, God is described as a roaring lion ready to pounce on his prey and Syria and its capital of Damascus are the first to receive judgment and punishment.

They had been enemies of Israel for a very long time and were a vicious and cruel people. They were exceptionally violent to the people of Gilead. Their prisoners were dragged over boards with iron spikes mangling their flesh from their bones in sadistic barbarity. And so God was to send the flame of war into the house of king Hazael and the strongholds of Benhadad and the iron gates of the city would allow not hinder the oncoming army; those who lived in the valley of Aven would be both cut off and isolated and people would go into captivity. Damascus would be captured and their king slain.

Judgment is God's strange work. His has no pleasure or delight in it.

The expression for three transgressions and for four does not indicate that is the only number of crimes; it is like a formula.

The second nation (verses 6- 8) is Philistia and Gaza is the selected city along with Ashdod, Askelon and Ekron. Of course, this is the land of the Philistines. They were involved with slave traffic handing over slaves for Edom to purchase.

Gaza was only three miles from the sea and on the main trade route from Egypt to Tyre. It was also a centre for idolatrous worship and the temple of Dagon was one of its important buildings. However, Ashdod was the chief seat of Dagon. Askelon was the centre of the fish goddess, Derceto, and Ekron was the centre of the Baal gods.

The Philistines raided areas to acquire slaves to sell. The abduction and selling of people is a horrendous crime.

Verses 9 and 10 deals with Phoenicia and the main city of Tyre. They were a seafaring nation and had supplied a lot of material to build Solomon's Temple.

The indictment against them was that they had given up a population of people to be slaves for Edom. Were these slaves from Israel? If so, to hand them to Edom was shocking because Edom had been enemies of Israel for a long time. All the common rights of the victims were violated. God would send fire upon Tyre and all her strongholds would be destroyed.

As with other minor prophets, the messages are clear. God loves His People and will punish their enemies yet have to discipline His own people because of their unfaithfulness.

Next in the spotlight is Edom (verses 11 and 12). Edomites were the descendants of Esau. The principal city was Sela sometimes called Petra but the prophet refers to Bozrah in the north and Teman in the south. Edom hated Israel and refused them passage through their land to the Promised Land. Edom sought every opportunity to oppose both Israel and Judah and therefore God was going to send the fire of His judgment and wrath upon them.

There are those who see in these verses the Arabs continual and irrational hatred of the Jews. The Arabs have hated the Jews since the days of Abraham and Ishmael and they have started the hostilities.

Verses 13 to 15 deals with Ammon's hatred and oppression of women. The Ammonites were the result of the actions of the incestuous son of Lot's younger daughter. Their capital was Rabbah, now known as Amman, and their god was Moloch and his worshippers made their children walk through fire to please him. One can hardly believe the cruelty of such idolatrous practices. Their barbarity was also shown in their desire to exterminate the people of Gilead with the emphasis on the murder of women and children to reduce the population and extend their territory. Hence the Lord will kindle a fire upon Rabbah and the city would collapse; the king and princes would go into exile and be humiliated and all their power broken.

Another lesson is to be learned from this is that God is a God of justice.

## **Chapter Two**

This chapter begins with the punishment destined for Moab, and, as with all other nations, punishment will not be revoked. This nation cremated the bones of the king of Edom with lime and therefore Divine fire of judgment will destroy Moab's strongholds and all of the royal household will die.

What made this deed so deplorable was that the universal law in the area was that such an act was both sacrilegious and outrageous. It was conducted in the case for criminals (Genesis 38.24, Leviticus 20. 14 etc). It was a mark of unrelenting hate and an unpardoning indignity to the dead and the family. The tombs were violated and, consequently, Moab was to be justly punished.

Verses 4 and 5 pass from Gentile nations to Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem and, as with all other examples, the Divine punishment will not be revoked. Judah had not kept the Divine law and, in fact, rejected it. They had promised faithfulness to God and not kept their promises. In common parlance they no longer appreciated all that God had done for them and such matters were now irrelevant to them. The fact that God loved them, and with an everlasting love, now meant little or nothing to them. Even the priests were reprobate and there were prostitutes of both sexes performing adulterous acts on holy ground and the priests excused this. Sin was no longer a matter of concern, repentance and remorse was totally absent. Karl Menninger wrote a book *Whatever happened to Sin?* And, referring to the time of Amos, and other times, writes about adultery, masturbation, drunkenness,

gambling and idolatry as only then receiving mild disapproval. Is the church condemning these things today?

Judah was reminded that they were going astray with many falsehoods. Churches today are doing that as well. To turn away from God and His ways and take on one's own ways was, and is, a deep insult to God Himself as is the introduction of new doctrines and methods of worship.

Within two centuries, fire did descend upon Jerusalem with the invasion of the Babylonians. Centuries later, the Romans sacked Jerusalem. People, even today, will not learn the lessons of the past. Holiness and loyalty to the Lord is not given priority. True doctrine is often discounted.

Verses 6 to 8 is a record of Israel's social misconduct with its oppression of the poor, disgusting sexual practices, idolatry and perversions. They ignore the afflicted; a father and his son have sex with the same girl, usually a Temple prostitute and before the altar on consecrated clothes used as a bed for their adultery, and drink the wine purchased with fines imposed upon offenders. There was no consciousness of wrongdoing and their religion had no impact on their conduct. God could not remain silent about such appalling misconduct of these heartless and ruthless people.

There follows judgment on the Amorites which is notified to Israel. The Amorites who were tall in the sense of being proud and because they lived in the highlands. Figuratively, they were as strong as oaks and as tall as cedars but were to be destroyed root and branch with the fruit above and the roots beneath.

Some time ago I was asked to translate chapter 2 verses 9 to 16 and it may be helpful to reproduce it below;

“The words of the Lord God to the people of Israel, “The Amorites were your enemies and yet I defeated them. They were tall people; tall like the cedar trees and they were very strong, strong as the oak trees. I defeated them completely on your behalf.

I delivered you from the land of Egypt and looked after you in the wilderness for forty years and then gave you victory over the Amorites.

I raised up prophets from among your own sons so that they would proclaim My words. I raised up some of your men to be Nazarites. People of Israel, is this not so?

But you denied my laws and gave the Nazarites wine to drink, and told the prophets not to speak on my behalf. You are treating me as if I were trapped under a cart heavily loaded with sheaves.

Therefore in battle the speed of your soldiers shall be no more; the strong shall no longer be strong or have any power; even the mightiest of soldiers will not be able to escape and deliver himself. The archers will not be able to stand to fire their arrows; the speedy runners shall not be able to escape, neither will those riding horses escape.

Even the most courageous, mighty and strong shall take off their armour and run away in their undergarments which is nakedness and a disgrace.”

This is what the Lord says.”

### **Chapter Three**

This begins with a summons for all Israel to hear what God has to say against Israel who, among other things, have ignored their deliverance from Egypt and many other blessings. Israel has

committed many iniquities and yet the Lord has favoured them above all other nations having set His love upon them. They were a privileged nation. As with some Christians today, the belief was that once you were saved you had no obligation to serve the Lord in personal faithfulness.

Verse 3 is often quoted. Can two walk together unless they have agreed? In the days of Amos, and others, if you were to make a journey particularly in the hill country, it was advisable to have a travelling companion with you. It would have to be someone you could trust and was of reputable character and someone of like mind. This verse has been used many times, and rightly so, with various applications. A marriage between two who seldom agree may well be disastrous. The ecumenical movement, know as Churches Together, has created endless problems with the amalgamation of all beliefs. I cannot agree that the Virgin Mary should be prayed to because it is not Biblical. I cannot accept that the Full Gospel has the essential doctrine that speaking in tongues is proof of the second blessing. That is not Biblical.

The next verse reminds us that the lion roars when he has captured his prey after stalking it quietly. The lion has to eat and therefore act accordingly. Amos is telling the people that God has to act and this announcement is like the roar of a lion.

A bird will not be trapped in a net had there been no bait to entice it. Such a trap does not activate itself. There are reasons for the roar of a lion and for the snare for a bird.

The trumpet blast in a city was usually a warning and would fill most with trepidation. It most likely referred to an imminent attack. Punishment was about to fall upon Israel because of their many iniquities. God always warns of his actions beforehand through His prophets. God will not leave his people without their prophets. He imparts a knowledge of His will in advance. In our day, people do not hear what God has said and are not interested. Some churches issue platitudes and bon-bons and do not give the message of the need of salvation and living the life that pleases God and not pleasing self. Many churches have said that they do not want to hear about holiness and judgment but to have fun and bask in the sunshine of God's love.

It will be noted that Amos uses the name Adonai which means My Lord

In verses 9 and 10 the Lord seems to be summoning spectators from Egypt and Ashdod to see the tumults about to happen. They are called to the mountains of Samaria, the capital of Israel. It was a city 300 feet up and surrounded by mountains from which you could see into the city. The city had no walls and had the appearance of an amphitheatre. These Gentile nations were known for their violence and were now to gaze upon the judgment upon Israel. They would see what would happen to those who had lost all sight of righteousness and were ignoring of moral standards.

In verse 11, an invasion of Israel is threatened whose strength would be brought down. The adversary is not named. Ultimately Samaria would be rescued just as a shepherd would rescue a sheep from a wild animal. A remnant of Israel would remain which would include some who lived in luxury on comfortable couches and silk divans (verse 12).

From verses 13 to 15, judgment is to come upon Judah and the Lord is now referred to Adonai Jehovah Elohim. At the same time of Divine visitation upon Israel so will there be Divine visitation upon Judah. No one and no property will be immune. Bethel once a centre for worship in Israel would be cast down as will idolatrous altars in Jerusalem. Even those who sought sanctuary by grasping the horns of the altar would no longer be safe. The wealth of Israel meant that many families had winter houses and summer houses. They live expensively and despised the poor. But judgment was to come up the rich.

The sanctuary at Bethel, and elsewhere, were eventually destroyed by good king Josiah (2 Kings 23.15) because they had become places of disrepute and idolatry.

When one reads of King David being a man after God's heart (which he was at first) and those who claim that Solomon was a type of Christ it could be said that Good King Josiah was probably the greatest king of them all but this is not so expressed.

## **Chapter Four**

The wealth and self-indulgence of Israel is placed in contrast to the peasant and artisan. It was scandalous because Israel's wealth had been taken from the poor. The working class had paid for the wealth of the so-called upper classes who had created suffering for the poor.

Much of this is due to sleek, well-fed women who were lazy and indolent like the cows of Bashan in the east of Jordan. This land produced the fattest and strongest of animals (Deuteronomy 32.24, Psalm 22.12) and sometimes they were used as a symbol of the mighty (Ezekiel 39.18). Here it speaks of female hedonism. They cared nothing for the price which they paid for their pleasures to gratify their every whim. It has been said that their luxuries were paid for by the tears of the poor. They demanded more from their husbands who were able to extort what their despicable wives wanted.

The Lord refers to these people of Amos's day as the kine of Bashan who will be drawn by hooks and fish hooks to meet their fate. They had to be punished for their wrong doing and were to be dragged off from their comfort and luxury for slavery. The enemy would breach the city's walls and the captives would be tormented by hooks and the crowds would gaze upon their misery. Some of the women would be handed over to prostitution to appease the Syrian goddess of love. They would be dragged naked and some would become corpses on the mountains of Romman and history confirms that this actually happened.

Verses 4 and 5 introduces irony. Wordsworth wrote that "it is a characteristic of idolatry and schism to profess extraordinary zeal for God's worship and go beyond the letter and spirit of His law by arbitrary will-worship and self-idolising fanaticism." This is so prevalent today in modern and trendy churches where the emphasis is on self and personal abilities. Social injustice meant nothing to Israel but self did. Their lack of moral and decent standards were of no importance to them. In the times of the day, and in so many churches today, self reigns with personal promotion at the fore, and the Lord Jesus and the worship of God is rarely honoured. The emphasis today is on the Holy Spirit and the charismatic gifts to extol self, whereas all the pre eminence must be given to the Lord Jesus.

Here Jehovah tears away the rags of false pretences and hypocritical postures and reveals His contempt for insincerity and unreality. There was evil in their hearts although they would not accept that. In their eyes; they were doing nothing wrong and they deceived themselves saying that their worship was true.

Gilgal and Bethel were sites when worship was made but how now could God receive the offerings when they were insincere and their pious posturings were hypocritical. The Lord mockingly bids them come to Bethel to transgress and to Gilgal to multiply their transgressions as an acknowledgment of their false piety. They had no consciousness of their guilt. Sin and trespass offerings were no longer made as the people of Israel said that were unnecessary. God calls the people in mockery to bring tithes every three days, instead of annually and to proclaim their freewill offerings to indicate their self-proclamation. They loved to proclaim themselves and perform the ritual of worship to advertise themselves. In churches today, there is self proclamation on a massive scale which is not in the service of the Lord Jesus and God has no place for unreality, insincerity and self adulation.

Verse 6 continues in what some have called God's mocking style and from verse 6 to verse 11 there are several catastrophes which God is to bring upon Israel with the intention of arousing them to repent and turn back to Him and realise their dependence on Him. Their failure to return meant that Divine blessings were withheld. The five catastrophes were famine (6), drought (7 and 8) crop failure (9), pestilence (10) and earthquake (11). The cleanness of teeth is picturesque language. Famine was one of the means that God employed to chastise them for wrong doing. Some has rightly said that Israel was God's covenant people and Israel had broken the covenant time and time again. Yet the Divine punishment had no effect upon the people.

The drought means the withholding of rain although harvest was only three months away. Some cities would have rain and some would not and the same would apply to land. Some dry cities would travel to wet cities to drink water but there was not enough. And all this was because the people would not return unto the Lord. In common parlance, the people were incredibly stupid and brought all these calamities upon themselves.

The ignorant people always blame God for calamities. Richard Dawkins is an atheist and yet writes and blames God for all sorts of things. He blames someone whom he says does not exist. God was blamed for a fire in my town which destroyed a theatre but it was proved that it was started by a cigarette. Does God smoke?

The failure of the crop is the next curse threatened if Israel did not obey Jehovah. This would be of blight and mildew (Deuteronomy 28.32). Again the people of Israel should have known from the past that God had punished before with this condition. As famine and drought had been ignored surely this disaster in the fields would bring them to their senses.

The blight was caused by the strong east winds and the mildew was caused by a combination of heat and damp. And then there were the locusts, destroyers of all green things. Despite all these troubles, Israel did not repent and did not return to the Lord and they only had themselves to blame.

Is there any condition in the church or any denominations where the people are stubborn and are resisting God' requirements?

Pestilence was also shown in the Law as one of the ways in which the Lord punished Israel. God sends them a pestilence which is likened to one that was sent upon Egypt. There had been a recent conflict and many in the army had been slain and their unburied bodies gave off a terrible stench and probably contributed do the pestilence. It was sent to draw the people back to Jehovah but they still persisted in their stubborn resistance.

The last retribution was an earthquake comparable to the one that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities were blotted out because of their gross sin and immorality. Here mercy saved some as if brands plucked from a fire.

The final warning is in verses 12 and 13. After all of God's pleadings and judgments, Jehovah warns the people of Israel to meet God. The text gives no indication of what is in God's mind and there is no suggestion of any national repentance on behalf of Israel.

Before we briefly pursue this, even in our day and among Christians there is complacency. Some believe that as their future is secure there is nothing to worry about and no need to be perturbed. Churches can worship God any way they like, or so they believe, whereas self-expression is not a requirement of worship. Worship is to reverent and quiet and honouring to the Lord Jesus. It is not to be entertainment or like a variety show with jumping up and down and noise. God is not deaf. Worship does not and must not involve self -exaltation but the acknowledgment of the worth of the Lord Jesus. He alone is worthy, not the pastor, the worship leader of the band of musicians.

As in this passage in Amos we must all live our lives in the knowledge that at any time we may meet the Saviour and these days may be more urgent than in the days of Amos. There is going to be a full revelation of the Lord to gather the living and dead believers to Himself at the Rapture and then there will His return to the earth in power and great glory. As with this prophecy, the Lord will tread on the heights of the earth and will reveal wonders in the heavens. At His Coming in glory, every eye shall see him and everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord including the atheists, Marxists, Communists and those of other faiths

## **Chapter Five**

The first three verses introduces a dirge and a funeral dirge at that. Amos has called upon the people to prepare to meet God, to return to Him and to repent, but all the calamities that befell them did not bring them to their senses. There was no sign of contrition.

Amos personifies Israel as a virgin maid laid on the ground violated by savage foes. The city might send out a thousand strong army but only a hundred would return. If a hundred went out, ninety would perish. And this all could have been avoided had Israel heeded the word of God and not been so arrogant.

And still the Lord calls his people to repent and not to visit the sanctuaries at Bethel or Gilgal but to visit Him. It may be relevant to state here that, even in our day, people seek a priest, a vicar, a minister or a pastor whereas they would do far better to seek the Lord. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength writes Isaiah. We live in days of platitudes such as ‘ Come to Jesus ‘ or ‘ Give your heart to Him ‘ but, as in the days of Amos, what must be dealt with first is sin and the people must come to the Lord and truly repent and accept the new life in Christ. Sloppy sentimentalism is no good.

Some denominations pride themselves on the alleged fact that they lead so and so to the Lord and were instrumental in their healing and recovery. That is trite doctrine. It is the Lord who calls and who is a very real help in times of trouble. No human flesh can glory in His presence. All Divine blessings are just that... Divine. There are some who think that they can do what God can do, and sometimes even better. I have heard people actually say this in accumulating glory for themselves. God resists the proud and that is a strong statement in the epistle to James and must be heeded.

I have heard some so called Christians say that all you have to do is to love Jesus and then they go on to imply that doctrine is not that important and whatever our doctrines are and whatever the doctrines of other denominations are, that does not matter one iota since all that matters is that you love Jesus. How can an unregenerate sinner love Jesus? It is not like putting a coat on! That is an insult to human intelligence and to God Himself!

To travel over the frontier to Beersheba will not help because the curse is upon the people wherever they go God's wrath was upon His people and with just cause. The remedy is not a different location but a change of heart! The people either returned to God or continued in their sin and be justly punished.

God as creator in one of the reminders in verse 7 to 9. He laments that righteousness has been cast down and turned into wormwood which is plant with a bitter taste. Justice in the courts had been unfair on the poor who had to suffer consequent bitterness. The rich and wealthy held sway over the legal system. Yet the Lord can turn the shadow of death into a beautiful morning but, because of the sin of the people, he could plunge the day into darkness. The brightness of prosperity could be changed into the dark night of adversity and the Lord calls the waters of the sea to cover the earth like a flood. God caused the destruction upon the strong and mighty and the strongholds were destroyed and, as we have said, all of this could have been avoided but for the continual sin of the

people and their deliberate acts in violation of the Divine will since God had loved and helped His people with great love and mercy.

As verse 10 indicates justice was often dealt with in the gateways of cities and large towns with the elders and judges sitting on the city walls to hear the cases and give a verdict. They were susceptible to bribery and corruption. When a monitor spoke up against injustice he caused anger and, in presenting the true facts, faced bitter opposition.

The following three verses are eye-openers. The wealthy class had acquired land of small farmers by foreclosing mortgages and by other devious means and also by extortion. Those who had been subject to such frauds had now to pay rents on their own land. Such wealthy schemers are denounced by Amos and these badly treated farmers would have to pay a toll of wheat in addition. These evil people had houses of hewn stone while most houses were built with dried brick. They planted vineyards for their own enjoyment but now they would not live in such luxury houses nor enjoy the fruit of their own vineyards. Judgment was coming. The sins of these people were great in oppressing the poor, gross injustice, taking bribes and the total disregard of the needy. All this evil meant that the wise men of Israel kept silence since whatever they said or did would be futile.

God had to do something! The absurd notion that God is cruel is not valid. As someone has said, "It was not that God was engaged in butchery, but in surgery." To all decent people, all evil and injustice must be eradicated.

The following verses, 14 and 15, introduce positivity. If good is sought them Israel would survive. This alone was the way forward, but people are so proud, self-promoting and, frankly, stupid. If Israel continued in their evil ways, all Divine favour would be removed. But, as the apostle John wrote, "People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." If Israel were to change and detest evil and put it away, Jehovah would again be to them the loving and merciful God as before. But repentance and justice were the priorities.

There are messages for us today as God's people. There is inconsistency and hypocrisy which is widespread in some so-called Christian circles. If we love our sins and indulge our desires, even in secret, how can we escape justifiable punishment? Why are there churches preaching false doctrine and praising mere men and allowing themselves to enjoy both self elevation and self-importance. Christianity is Christ and not self. Why do some follow man-made Christianity with modern, trendy and worldly ideas? These are false pretences. We are to love and serve the Lord His way, not ours.

Verses 16 and 17 introduces us the weeping and wailing of the people everywhere as God's righteousness fell upon them. Death passed through. No longer could punishment be delayed and even professional wailers would take part. Even those who kept the feast days and made offerings were rejected by God. Lip service is not the same as genuine service and it should cause us to think that our service for the Lord is merely a habit and just something that we do because we have always done so. God cannot have fellowship with unworthy worshippers and does that not also apply to those who worship God their own way and not His way?

The day of the Lord is regularly referred to in the Old Testament as a day of judgment with clouds and thick darkness. Yet the people of Israel had longed for this day presumably not realising what it meant. Of what possible benefit would it have for them? It would be destruction and death and unexpected disasters. A man would be bitten by a serpent in his own house or flee from a lion only to meet a bear and the Syrian bear was fiercer than a lion. You cannot escape the righteous punishment of God.

It is worth remembering that God is righteous in all His ways and that judgment and punishment is His strange work in which He has no delight. Jeremiah wrote of God, “ He doth not afflict willingly not grieve the children of men.”

God had no pleasure in the burnt offerings, the meal offerings, the peace offerings or their observance of religious festivals nor does he enjoy their songs chanting the praise of God. They could not be accepted because these practices were not meant and their lives were saturated with sin. Will we be rejected at the Judgment Seat if Christ because of our inconsistency? Of course, our salvation is secure

Verse 24 calls for justice to roll. If the offerings and festivals were unacceptable to God what could the people do? If communion with God was to be restored then justice must be revived and repentance be made sincerely. All injustices must be swept away and all evil to be no more, dishonest practices were also to be no more. Justice must flow as in the rainy season and when the streams constantly flowed even in the driest places. Justice had to run through the whole of society and there were to be no exceptions.

In the wilderness, sacrifices were made for forty years. Were they essential for fellowship with God or did the people fail in all their obligations to God. Today, we must realise that fellowship with God must be real and vital and fellowship is not sharing everything with others. It is not nosiness as practised by many, even in Christian circles where some want to know all about you. Is our communion with God a mere obligation?

The final verses, 26 and 27 indicates that the people of Israel were not honouring God and they were freely paying homage to other gods such as Moloch and Chiun. The whole matter of idolatry is raised again. Israel had turned to false gods and false practices. Why when they had had the benefits of God’s goodness and love for so long a time? The people would go into exile beyond Damascus, an indication of some unknown place, and their fate was because of their sins, evil ways and their refusal to obey the Lord

## **Chapter Six**

This chapter concerns the wealthy people in Israel who live in ease and luxury and put their trust in the security of Samaria. They were oblivious to their real state which was of sin, idolatry and disregard for God. Their men were men of mark that is to say men of distinction, or so they thought, and people came to them as they had political and economic control. Amos referred to Zion, that is to say Jerusalem capital of Judah, the southern kingdom, who were also complacent. In verse 2, Amos asks if any surrounding nation is comparable with the two kingdoms. Were these other nations superior? Calneh and Hamath were important cities but were they superior? I do not know why Gath is mentioned as Uzziah had captured it in 760 BC.

Verses 3 to 6 refer to the pampered rich who ignored the warnings of impending doom for the dreadful sinners of Israel. They had listened to Amos with pessimism and believed that nothing would happen to them. All of his prophecies were idle talk and meant nothing. The day of God’s judgment would not happen and the people ridiculed the judgment that was said to come in evil days. They were digging their own graves although they had luxury beds, the best of food, musical entertainment, drank much wine and perfumed themselves with expensive ointments. They were not concerned about the house of Joseph, their own land. None of this was honouring to God and rapidly heading to self destruction of Israel.

The following two verses speak of the status that Israel had reached. They lived in wild revelry and their parties could be heard. Today would be a day of mirth but soon will come a day of judgment. Jehovah hates all of this and will put an end to it and to the cities and strongholds. God hated their

pride as he does today even among Christians who boast and talk about self. Such pride is an abomination to God. Self-sufficiency was also of no avail to Israel and they had no concept of the Lordship of Jehovah.

It would not now be long before the Assyrians would capture Samaria and its strongholds and the people be taken into exile. God's words to Amos would be fulfilled.

As Christians today, we must not live in luxury or be gluttons. The church is not to be a vehicle for entertainment, dance and quasi pop-music. Nor should we make our appearance in any way to be glamorous or trendy and it is the Lord Jesus that must be preached and spoken about, not ourselves.

While we do not wish to detract from the work of the Holy Spirit there are many modern churches who make the Holy Spirit to be elevated and have the most attention. His function is to draw men and women to Christ and not to Himself.

Verses 9 and 10 refers to the siege of Samaria in which many would die. Military conflict was not the only problem, disease and a possible plague. The siege would produce starvation and malnutrition, Corpses would have to be cremated. If someone was found dead in a house a call would be made to see if there was survivor and the name of Jehovah would not be mentioned in case they produced a further Divine curse. Or it may refer to the mention of Jehovah as an admission of the sin of the people. Whatever is said, the people of Israel were suffering because of their sin and evil ways. It was their fault entirely.

The next verse talks of Jehovah's commands and houses of the rich and the not so rich would be destroyed. No one will escape.

Horses do not run on rocks and the sea is not ploughed with oxen and yet Israel has turned justice into gall and righteousness into wormwood. Amos taunted the people with rejoicing in Lodebar which name means a thing of nought and glorying in when they captured Karnaim which name means horns and strength. This was no cause for rejoicing as these victories were insignificant. Some people when they experience some acknowledgment, this boosts their ego and we live in a society which thrives on this and this also happens with some Christians, a little bit of limelight encourages them to pride and self-importance. There are Christians who are empire builders. We must not praise ourselves, or a fellow Christian since even our own righteousness is like filthy rags. In all things, yes, all things, Christ must have the pre eminence certainly not self, the pastor or any human being. Praising God is not self-congratulation nor ever should it be.

God will raise up a nation against Israel at a time when they appear to be rejoicing over some previous minor successes. Like Zion. Israel believed themselves to be perfectly secure and that no trouble would befall them (verses 1 and 13 refer).

It reminds of the scripture, Let him that thinks he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

## **Chapter Seven**

This appears to be a dialogue between the prophet and God. All the visions given to Amos about the forthcoming Divine punishment indicates that Amos pleads for the people to be spared.

The chapter begins with a vision of a swarm of locusts attacking the rapid growth of crops after the rains of March and April. The kings mowing may refer to the tax levied on pasture land to obtain food for the horses. Locusts would consume and destroy all greenery including vegetables. They were a regular curse and when they had eaten everything what would be left for human consumption? The locust was often an instrument of God's curse (Deuteronomy 28.38).

Amos beseeches the Lord to spare the people and the Lord changed his mind and did so.

Jehovah hears the cry of his people via their representative. The prophet Isaiah called upon God to deal with the people in consideration and this is another example of the merciful God. It is important to note that Amos was the prophet, the Lord's spokesman, but also the intercessor for the people.

Verses 4 to 6 speak of another vision in which Jehovah is calling for judgment by fire which would devastate the land and the water supply. Fire is often the symbol of God's wrath. Here Amos pleads for Divine mercy and to show forgiveness to Israel as the prophet had requested when commenting on the vision of the locusts. Again the Lord repented, that is to say changed His mind.

Although many churches do not emphasize doctrine and are not concerned about the meaning of words and terminology it must be stated here that God repenting does not in any way mean that God had sinned. Repentance means to turn away from sin but God is not, nor could be, a sinner. Repentance means to change one's mind. Amos uses his same plea that God's people are so small.

We have already mentioned that judgment is God's strange work and He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

The use of the plumb line is now discussed. Here is the Lord standing by a wall with a plumb line in His hand to see if the wall was perpendicular. The wall was apparently beginning to crack and, therefore, becoming unstable. The wall was a picture of Israel and that God was using a plumb line in the midst of His people and, like the wall, the people were no longer safe and to be levelled to ground and Divine judgment was about to fall. Amos, whom God now calls by name, makes no plea or intercession here.

Jehovah had passed by His people in the past particularly at the first Passover but now all the high places and sanctuaries would be destroyed. Jeroboam had tolerated the sin and idolatry of the people and so judgment would be poured out on his house.

It causes us to consider how God might deal with the leaders in our country particularly those such as George Galloway and Ken Livingstone who despise the Jews and have strong atheistic views and a hatred of the God of the Bible. However, we read that Divine judgment will begin at the House of God. It is imperative that we, as Christians, have lives that please God and are true to Scriptures.

As in the verses before us, God is sovereign, the Ruler in the heavens and the earth.

There now follows a dispute between Amos, Amaziah the priest of Bethel concerning king Jeroboam. The priest complains to the king that Amos is saying things that are unbearable and stirring up a controversy. Furthermore, he is forecasting the death of the king. Amaziah saw nothing spiritual or anything of God in the message and, as priests were chosen by the king, he was obliged to be loyal to the throne and put the monarch first. As far as the priest was concerned, Amos should not be allowed to say these things or wander around making these comments. The prophet was probably accused of treason. There appears to be no action taken by the king.

Amaziah tells Amos to run away and go into Judah and leave Israel alone. Why should a southerner denounce the northern kingdom? What was it to do with him? He is not to prophesy against the royal sanctuary of Bethel as it was a temple of the kingdom. Amos replies that he is not a prophet as such but a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees but God had called him to prophesy to the people of Israel. Anyone who resists Amos's message was resisting God.

So it is today and not only with unbelievers but with some who call themselves Christians who add to the Bible or take away from it and who introduce new doctrines not found in the sacred Scriptures.

The final verses of this chapter is a Divine rebuke against Amaziah. He is told that his land will be forfeited, Israel shall go into exile, his wife will become a prostitute, which was an abominable shame to any husband, and his children will perish. The punishment was severe but it would fall on all Israel and it was their fault because of the sin, evil ways, idolatry and total disregard for God.

## **Chapter Eight**

This chapter begins with the vision of summer fruits. This may represent an offering made at Bethel in the autumn which happened at the end of harvest.

The contents of the basket indicated the end of the harvest since the end had come for Israel who were ripe for judgment. It was too late for penitence. Jehovah said, "I will never again pass by them." Mercy had been shown them, warnings had been given but they had taken no notice but continued in their evil ways and idolatry. Harvest was a time for rejoicing but now it would be of wailing. Divine judgment would come and there would be numerous deaths that burials would prove impossible. There would be nothing but grief and sorrow brought upon them by themselves.

In our day, God is blamed for many things. Even the atheist, Richard Dawkins who does not believe in God blames Him for troubles. With other cases, if no one can be considered for blame such events are called acts of God which is both unfair and ridiculous. A theatre in my town was burned down and it was claimed to be God's fault or that God allowed it to happen. It was discovered that the fire was caused by a cigarette and someone said, "God does not smoke!"

John had a stroke at the age of forty two and is paralysed for the rest of his life. God has been blamed and it has been said, "If God is a god of love He would not have allowed this! It is God's fault. "

There are other reasons concerning his life style which may have caused his illness.

Verses 4 to 8 deal with the traders and merchants who exploited the poor and trod them down and increased their poverty and probably caused their end. If the poor died the traders could take over their land and houses and gain further advantage. The traders' religious ceremonies were a mockery and when those ceremonies were over they continued to inflict the poor ruthlessly.

There is another lesson for us here. It is not for us to criticise, but some people go to church for various reasons, a sense of duty, for prestige, to meet with others to exchange business matters, to see what Mrs Jones is wearing and, even in evangelical churches, to have fellowship, which is nosiness, or to promote self. The church is to honour and worship God, to learn His ways and walk in them. We do not follow any rites or rules of any church but study the Scriptures and follow Christ.

Amos was tearing away hypocrisy. The traders were deceitfully using false balances. They deliberately increased the weight of the shekel to make further gains. Driven to such penury even a pair of sandals was donated towards an unfair debt and some went into slavery. Farmers selling their own produce were now in the hands of the ruthless traders.

The following verses speak of the earthquake to come which would cause fear. It was linked with the disgraceful behaviour of Israel and there would be no escape. The disaster would be no mere natural happening but God punishing the inhabitants of Israel.

The upheavals and convulsions of the Nile was a fit symbol of the earthquake (Isaiah 24. 19ff). Amos tells us that this event would be accompanied by an eclipse of the sun. There was a total eclipse of the sun in Israel on 15 June 763 BC and this may be the event here. The sun would set at noon and the earth would be in darkness. The festivals which were times of rejoicing would be of severe lamentation since the judgment of God would come and the happy songs would be like funeral dirges.

At a time of grief the people would wear sackcloth round the loins (2 Samuel 3.31) and shave their heads although this was against the law (Deuteronomy 14. 1). Nothing escapes the eyes of God. It would appear that the Lord allows men to go unchecked for a long time but the day of reckoning will come.

A time of famine would follow but it would be a spiritual famine not a thirst for water but to know what Jehovah is saying. There would be a frantic running to and fro throughout the land to hear the words of Jehovah. Amos and the prophets had been disregarded and they would eventually die and who then would speak the words of the Lord. When people are in trouble they may seek God whom they do not believe in and have hitherto ignored, and, as in Amos, realise their loss and seek the words of God. The people of Israel, including the young ones, would swoon in exhaustion in their search for any contact with God but the heavens would be as brass.

We live in days when countries who once honoured God no longer do so and have turned their backs upon God and refuse to listen to His word. The Scriptures have been both ridiculed and despised. This also happens among Christians who add to and take away from the Word of God. In 1899 the Pentecostals began basing their stance on what they called the new revelation of God with the claims of the second blessing and the speaking in tongues and healing being available to all and essential to all true believers. The Jehovah Witnesses also believe that they are the only ones who are right but have false doctrines.

The final verse in this chapter speaks of idolatry which not only referred to false gods but hypocrisy in worshipping the true God including at Beersheba to which religious pilgrimages were made. The guilt of Samaria probably refers to the worship of the golden calf at Dan and there was the goddess Ashimah who was worshipped at Hamath and elsewhere.

In our day, we worship God and do not put our admiration on the pastor, music group, dancers, entertainment, worship leader or our denomination. In all things and in everything Christ and He alone must have the pre eminence.

## **Chapter Nine**

With all the gloom and doom of the first eight chapters we now come to the final chapter which is of ultimate blessing and also deals with the dispersion of Israel. Adonai is standing by the altar prepared to implement justice. The name Adonai speaks of Divine Sovereignty whereas the name Jehovah refers to the God of the covenant.

This would be an ominous sight. The altar had seen many foolish and hypocritical sacrifices but now there stands the Almighty God presumably at Bethel. The whole place would shake and collapse and bury any worshippers in the ruins. The people had boasted that the Lord was with them (Amos 5.14) but Adonai was now to demonstrate that there was hypocrisy and no fellowship, no truth or sincerity.

A lesson for us is that we must be sincere, but some people are sincere but wrong. Do we realise that God is worthy of our devotion and willing submission to Him? Worship is worthship. In quietness and confidence is our strength. It is not in exuberance and self-expression. We are to worship God with reverence and godly fear. That is to say respect. Worship is not the lifting of hands since God is not worshipped with hands. Reverence is the bowing of the head, heart and knees although this may be expressed as symbolism.

God requires worship His way and His ways are not our ways. Worship is not entertainment or a variety show.

Verses 2 to 4 has a grim message. No one will escape the holocaust, the Divine judgment to fall upon Israel. They may seek refuge in the depths or the heavens but there would be no hiding place since no place is out of reach of the Almighty (Psalm 139, 7 to 12) and this included Carmel with its many caves and impregnable forests. Even if the people could seek safety at the bottom of the sea the ferocious hydrophidae would find them and bite them. The people would go into exile but there would be no protection. God would set His eyes upon them but not for good but for the deserved evil of punishment.

We must try to see all this from God's viewpoint. He had loved these people, showed them every consideration and everlasting love, tenderness and mercy and yet they were ungrateful, evil, pursuing idolatry as did their ancestor, Solomon. They had no sense of social justice but were cruel and ruthless, despising the poor and their mistreatment of their own people was second only to their dismissal of the Lord.

The next two verses major on the power of God in the context that what He said He was going to do He had the might and power to do so. Amos declares that when God touches the earth it melts and rises and sinks like a river, heaves like a flood and the inhabitants are terrified. The melting rocks will pour out lava disturbed by the earthquake. The prophet further declares that God built His upper chambers in the heavens and the vast firmament is like a massive arch over the earth. The ancients believed that there was a vast supply of water above the firmament released by God as rain.

Verse 7 is significant. Israel had rejected the Divine messages through Amos and continued in their appalling and evil ways. They behaved as if God did not exist and were therefore on the same level as the nations round about. The most remote people were the Cushites, also known as Ethiopians, who lived in Nubia and were despised because of their black skin.

The wife of Moses was a Cushite (Numbers 12.1). Israel often used Cushites as slaves.

Israel accepted that God had delivered them from Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan and had also directed the migration of other nations. The Philistines went from Caphtor to Crete (Jeremiah 47. 4) and there were the movements of the Aramaeans (Syrians) from Kir in Mesopotamia. This shows that the Lord was concerned with all nations of the earth which subject Paul took up in Romans 3. 20. Israel had a cavalier attitude to the Lord who reminded them that there were other people in whom He was interested.

The next verse deals with the dispersion of Israel described by the Lord as a sinful kingdom which is to be destroyed from the face of the earth. The whole of Israel will be shaken at the command of the Almighty. Israel shall be sieved as grain and such sieves were large and used in threshing possessing a large mesh to separate the trash from the grain. Some of the debris would be stones and so God's action would be a violent shaking. The Lord says that the other kingdom, Judah, also known as the house of Jacob, would not be utterly destroyed. Yet complacent Israel insisted that evil would not come upon them.

The Assyrian invasion is in mind here and all the sinners of Israel would be slain. The very false security of Israel and their evil ways is the reason for their coming downfall.

But there is hope. God's covenant with David stated that David's prosperity would never be completely exterminated and his political kingdom of Israel would continue for ever (2 Samuel 7, 12-16, 1 Chronicles 17, 11-14, 22, 9 -10). This did not imply that there would be an unbroken successions of kings but that a descendant of the royal hoses would sit upon the throne (Jeremiah 33. 17-21). Israel was to be conquered by the Assyrians and, eventually, Judah would be conquered by the Babylonians and both the people of Israel and Judah would be dispersed.

God's message to the people via Amos was that the kingdom of Israel would fall but, at some future date, would be raised and restored to its former glory. It is implied that the two kingdoms would be reunited as in the days of old which indicates a long period of time. The other nations may refer to those corrected by the Lord's actions Amos was stating that there was a glorious future ahead for Israel.

The final two verses speak of the future and the blessings of the millennial reign of the Lord upon the earth (Revelation 20. 5). This would be a time of unparalleled fertility in the land. Growth would be so productive that the reaper would be at work almost immediately. Normally ploughing started after the October rain and harvesting of barley and wheat would be in April and May. The vineyards would be very productive. Israel would be restored to her lands and never be removed from it again. All the towns and cities shall be restored and inhabited. Gardens would be prosperous and fruit would be in plenty.

Recent conflicts between Palestinians and Israel have been widely and unfairly presented totally as Israel's fault and the claim that the Holy Land does not belong to the Jews. The world is full of anti-Semitism and some politicians in the UK have such irrational and cruel hatred towards the Jews that it encourages more violence. But one day, all these evil politicians will bow the knee to God and be shown up as those who hated God's people and they will be punished accordingly. In fact everyone will admit that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2. 10ff)

## OBADIAH

Obadiah's name means servant of Jah and it is a common name in the Old Testament.

There was a steward of Ahab and during Jezebel's persecution this Obadiah hid a hundred prophets in a cave and provided for them (1 Kings 18). Another Obadiah was a descendant of David who may have been the son of Aman or that he was identical with Abiud a descendant of Zerubbabel of Matthew 1.13 or the Judah a descendant of Zerubbabel in Luke 3.26.

There was another of the same name who was the son of Izrahiah from the tribe of Issachar (1 Chronicles 7.3). Another Obadiah was a son of Azel, a descendant of Saul (1 Chronicles 8.38) There was a Levite with the same name (1 Chronicles 9.16) and another who joined David at Ziklag (1 Chronicles 12.9). Another was the father of Ishmaiah the head of the tribe of Zebulun in the time of David. Jehoshaphat sent princes including one Obadiah to teach the law in the cities of Judah (2 Chronicles 17.7).

When good king Josiah repaired the Temple, an overseer of the work was an Obadiah (2 Chronicles 34.12). There was a descendant of Joab who returned to Israel with Ezra (Ezra 8. 9). One of the priests who joined Nehemiah in signing a covenant was an Obadiah (Nehemiah 10. 5) and, presumably, the same man was one of the porters (Nehemiah 12.25)

The prophecy of Obadiah concerns the people of Edom who were descendants of Esau who were the enemies of the people of God. They were fearsome and ruthless people who defeated the Horites in the mountainous are of Seir caves hewn out of the red sandstone.

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC they had the help of the Edomites who rejoiced in the troubles that befall their own enemies.

Obadiah's prophecy was partially fulfilled at the time of this Babylonian invasion but will be completer in the last days when Israel, restored to their land, will be attacked by Edom and kindred nations (Isaiah 34.5). Obadiah predicts that the Jews will bring about Edom's destruction which tallies with Daniel 11.14.

The book has seven sections in the following verses

- 1a     introducing the prophet
- 1b-4   the destruction of Edom's fortress
- 5-9    Edom's punishment
- 10-14  violence against the people of God is the main reason for the judgment of Edom
- 15-16  judgment of all nations who are enemies of the Jews
- 17-20  God's people are saved and restored
- 21     the prediction of a millennial kingdom

The book indicates the sovereignty of God, that all the enemies of God will be punished and God's people will ultimately be blessed and restored. The world has always been against the Jews and today Christians are both ridiculed and persecuted particularly under the left wing politics of Marxism, Communism and Socialism.

If you persecute God's people you are attacking God. God's people are the apple of His Eye (Zechariah 2.8). The apostle Paul persecuted Christians (Acts 9) but was also persecuting the Lord.

What must be remembered is that prophets are not with us today although they will be in the millennial reign of Christ in Jerusalem ( see article on Joel ).Paul wrote some twenty years after the resurrection that prophecy will fade away and the Revelation tells us not to add to the Scriptures. All that God wants us to know is in the Scriptures which are perfect which word means complete.

The book concentrates on condemnation of Edom and other nations who are against the Jews. Edom trusted in their stronghold being impregnable and said, Who will bring us down? And God replies, Though you live in the clefts of the rocks I will bring you down.

Edom controlled many of the trade routes and demanded money of the merchants hence the mention of their riches (verse 6).

The Edomites were a proud and pompous people and pride is one of the greatest sin in the human race and we do not learn the lessons from it.

Sadly today there are Christians who are proud and self promoting. They talk about themselves and what they have achieved and some use testimony to relish in their dreadful sinful past. What God has dealt with must not be brought up again is the clear Bible teaching.

The apostle James tells us that God resists the proud. He is against them and they must accept the Bible teaching that no one is to glory in God's presence and that must mean in the presence of God's people. The prophet Isaiah says that even our righteousness is as filthy rags. Paul says that we must not boast only in the glory of the Cross.

The Edomites had allies with the Chaldeans, the Babylonians against the Jews their enemies. Verse 7 speaks of Edom's allies would with turn against them. After the Babylonians had defeated Jerusalem they turned against Edom, Moab and Ammon as stated in Jeremiah 27. 3. The hand of God was in this as verse 8 says, In that day says Jehovah will not destroy the wise men from Edom on the mount of Esau? The next verse speaks of Divine slaughter of Edom and that they will be cut off for ever because of their violence to Judah (verse 10) who is described as Jacob's brother. Incidentally, Teman is another name for the clan of the Edomites.

It has to be repeated that God will punish all who set themselves against His People. How the Jews have been persecuted throughout the centuries is appalling and left wing politics such as Socialism, Marxism and Communism have persecuted Christians

O Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me  
And all things else recede.  
My heart be daily nearer Thee  
From sin and self be daily freed.

The message of this book is that Edom will be made small and with other enemies of His people will be defeated. All who persecute and attack the Jews will inevitably be punished by God. It is sad to recount that some Christians show no consideration for the Jews and fight among themselves often over trivial things and personal empire building. How often does a sword destroy a brother, a fellow believer? How often are we permanently alienated because of unkind words and actions and the callous indifference and neglect by fellow believers? Cruelty against the Jews must be condemned but there is a lack of love of Christians towards fellow Christians is also unacceptable. We are not to set our brother at naught.

All that Edom had worked for including their wealth has been taken by strangers (verse 11). Edom had rejoiced in the days of Judah suffering and their misfortunes with hatred and ridicule. Today, Jews and Christians still suffer but they will be vindicated and all their enemies will be punished without mercy. Verse 12 speaks of those who opened their mouths at the times when the people of God were in distress. God's people are under the hammer even now and by politics, science, the occult and a secular society that does not follow the moral teachings of the Bible, but despise such teaching.

William Kelly has supplied a good commentary on verses 13 and 14 when he writes:

“There is nothing that exhibits more malice and wickedness than to take advantage of another when he is ruined or sorrow wastes the spirit and divine chastening. It is a heart altogether depraved that could take advantage of another's fall to trample yet more on him who is in the dust”

Edom gloated over their brother's tribulation. The Jews that escaped from the siege of Jerusalem were cut off by the Edomites.

Verses 15 and 16 introduces an eschatological significance with in the content of the last days with the expression the day of the Lord which refers to the end time and includes that all nations including Edom will be judged. This theme also appears in Amos 1 and Edom is one of many nations who will be judged. This is, of course, still future and we should remind ourselves that the day is coming when every knee shall bow to the Lord Jesus and confess that He is Lord, and that means everybody from monarchs, politicians, atheists, scientists, world leaders and the common man.

As Christians today we have to suffer persecution and ridicule on an increasing scale and we can be somewhat depressing. But, ultimately, we will be vindicated and all our tormentors will admit that they were wrong as they acknowledge Christ in a day to come. Atheism and other features will be shown as a complete lie and those who held anti-Christian views will be the dust at the Saviour's feet. Like the Edomites those who perform unhallowed revelry and have wild carousals at the expense of Jews and Christians.

When the final conflict God will empower His people to be victorious over all her enemies. There are those telling verses in Isaiah 63 where the Messiah in blood-stained garments will be seen coming from Bozrah, a major city in Idumea having trod the winepress of wrath alone. His anger at the nations who have damaged His people is spoken about graphically.

For the Lord's people after the Chaldean invasion there will be restoration and holiness and the house of Jacob shall have possessions and be restored. In the last days also the Jewish people will be vindicated and blessed. As we have said the Jews are still the apple of His eye.

Verse 18 speaks of the Jewish people being a fire and Esau being stubble and that there would be no survivors. The Lord will give His people a complete victory and ultimately that will be blessing of Jews and Christians alike.

When all my labours and trials are o'er  
And I am safe on that beautiful shore  
Just to be near the Lord I adore  
Will thro' the ages be glory for me.

Light after darkness,  
Gain after loss,  
Strength after weakness,  
Crown after cross,

Sweet after bitter,  
Hope after fears,  
Home after wanderings,  
Praise after tears.

The climax of this book is when it says, The kingdom shall be the Lords since God is ultimately the Supreme Ruler and He is all in all.

While it may not always seem like it, we, as Christians are on the victory side.

This prophecy is also an indication of the state of the world today which is hostile to God and wants to be independent of Him.

# JONAH

## Introduction and Chapter One

Jonah is the only one of the so-called minor prophets that the Lord Jesus referred to. There is an indirect reference in John 7.54. Both the Lord and Jonah came from Galilee.

There is also a direct reference in Matthew 12. 40, known as the sign of Jonah, where the Lord says that as Jonah was three days and nights in the whale's belly so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth referring to Christ's death and resurrection.

We must be wary of typology by which some say that Old Testament characters are types of Christ. No one can be that. Jonah was reluctant to do God's Will; the Lord Jesus was not. See such verses as Isaiah 46. 5. No one can compare with the Lord and no one should.

God spoke to Jonah for him to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to preach to them to repent of their evil ways and great wickedness.

This prophet was the son of Amittai who is referred to in 2 Kings 14. 25 and he prophesied mercy upon Israel which prophecy was fulfilled in the reign of Jeroboam II (791-753 BC). The name Amittai means truth and the name Jonah means dove.

As in the book of Amos, God shows his interest in other nations and not just in Israel and Judah. Other prophets had spoken against Assyria but the Lord instructs Jonah to get up and go to Nineveh, the great city situated on the east bank of the river Tigris near modern Mosul about 500 miles from Joppa.

But Jonah, sometimes called the reluctant missionary, ran away from the presence of the Lord and choose to go to Tarshish which most scholars believe was on the west coast of Spain or Portugal. Arriving at the port of Joppa, he found a ship bound for Tarshish and paid his fare for a journey which may have been over 2,500 miles away if this place was in Spain or Portugal. Some have said it might have been in Sardinia.

Tarshish was a place rich in silver, tin, iron and lead (Ezekiel 27. 12, Jeremiah 10. 9) where jobs were probably readily available.

He was running away and in the completely opposite direction. Why did he run away?

It may have been due to the knowledge that Nineveh was both a cruel and hostile city.

Or the rabbis may have suggested that Jonah foresaw the repentance of Nineveh and this could reflect adversely upon the Israelites who, despite many warnings, had not repented of their own evil ways and idolatry. Jonah would not be willing to see mercy shown to Israel's enemies.

It could be that Jonah would lose face if his words were not fulfilled.

A severe storm broke out on the voyage and the pagan sailors were afraid, although they would be used to storms at sea. They tried to row the ship to land. They cast lots to determine who was responsible for this tempest, after they had thrown goods overboard to lighten the vessel. Jonah was fast asleep below decks.

The lot fell upon Jonah who was asked why this potential disaster had occurred. In verse 9, Jonah admits that he was a Hebrew who feared the Lord who made the sea and the dry land. The sailors

understood that Jonah was running away from the Lord because the prophet had indicated this. They asked Jonah, “What shall we do with you? How can we make the waters calm?”.

Jonah shows his concern for the sailors and requests that they cast him into the sea. Was this also a plea for suicide? Was it Jonah’s way out of his dilemma? If this was done, what assurance was there that the sea would be at peace and the sailors safe?

There is a lesson here. In the UK and the West, we may have the idea that God is not interested in pagan nations and, as a consequence, we do not have any interest either and do not care.

What was the great fish? The Hebrews were not a seafaring nation and even today some people describe air-breathing mammals as fish. Jonah was swallowed by a great fish to save him from drowning, to discipline him and to foreshadow the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus who also came from Galilee. It may also look forward to the swallowing of the Jews by the Babylonians.

What was Jonah’s psychological state? Some have said that he was giving his life to save the sailors from drowning. Others liken this to the death and resurrection of Jonah since Jonah was three days and nights inside the great fish and so this is compared with the Lord Jesus. Some have opined that Jonah was unconscious all, or some of the time in the belly of the great fish.

## **Chapter Two**

Jonah prayed to God from inside the great fish. He cried to the Lord because of His circumstances and affliction and God heard Him. Jonah laments that God has cast him in the sea and the flood of waters and the billows overcame him but the prophet also believed that God had cast him out of His Holy Presence. He now sets his own sight on the holy temple since he has remembered the Lord as a result of having been at the bottoms of the mountains with the bars of the earth around him. Some said that the bars that surrounded Jonah were the ribs of the great fish and that weeds also surrounded him.

It is interesting to note that he quotes from the Psalms. He knew the Scriptures.

In verse 8, the prophet speaks of vanities which is translated as vain idols and that those who practise idolatry forsake the possibility of mercy. However, Jonah will sacrifice with thanksgiving in his heart and honour his vows. He also makes the statement that salvation is of the Lord.

There are those who preach that salvation is in the church or in the rituals of the church and there are denominations that claim that salvation is only available in their teachings and the adherence to those teachings.

The chapter ends with God speaking to the great fish who vomits Jonah on to dry land.

## **Chapter Three**

We do not know where Jonah landed. The journey throughout this great city of Nineveh would take three days where Jonah was to have first hand experience of ‘foreigners’.

The word of the Lord had come to him the second time and the message was the same. His message was for the city to repent within forty days or the city would be overthrown. The city did repent and they believed God and all the people wore sackcloth and ashes, outward signs of humbling before God. Even animals were draped with sackcloth and there was a universal fast.

Now there is no historical account of such repentance in Assyrian records but the people were to turn from all their evil ways and God would turn from His fierce anger and not perform His intended punishment upon these people.

The unanswered question is why did these cruel and hostile people repent ? Had they seen Divine punishment on other nations? Was Jonah a mighty preacher? Did Nineveh want a fresh start? Did the city already have a group of people who wanted reform?

## **Chapter Four**

Jonah's response to Nineveh's repentance made him very angry and he asks the Lord to take his life. He criticises God for His mercy and kindness and for withdrawing the intended Divine punishment on this wicked city. Jonah is here disputing God's Lordship and power. He has forgotten the grace that the Lord had shown to him.

Jonah feared the possible consequences upon Israel following Nineveh's repentance. God had shown mercy to Israel's enemies who had been spared death. Jonah had an attitude problem and reminds us that he wanted to flee to Tarshish. The Lord poses the rhetorical question to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry "

The prophet makes himself a booth, where he can sit and watch what would happen in Nineveh. The Lord made a gourd grow and give him shelter which calmed him down somewhat. This plant was known for its rapid growth. But God also prepared a worm which later attacked the plant so that it withered. Now the fierce sun beat down upon Jonah and there was also a vehement east wind and Jonah again expresses his wish to die. God asks Jonah if he is angry about the gourd and the reply is that he had very right to be angry.

The lesson is clear. It is one thing to be angry over a plant which was not spared, but it is another thing that one hundred and twenty thousand people had been spared in Nineveh and at a time when these people did not know their left hand from their right hand.

Perhaps we should comment briefly upon Jonah's state. He was depressed and suicidal.

Depression can affect Christians and loneliness is one of the most frequent causes. I know of people who live in areas where there is no assembly of believers who faithfully adhere to the Scriptures and, consequently, they are isolated and alone. A famous hymn writer, William Cowper, suffered from severe mental illness and was twice confined. Elijah and Jeremiah, two fine men of God, suffered from such things and I have heard Christians in the medical profession say that no Christian should experience such trauma. I have a dear friend who has suffered greatly because a Pentecostal church said she was not saved because she has not spoken in tongues. She now hates Christianity.

In the days in which we live, Christian virtue is dismissed and secularism has taken over. Even some Christians can be cruel and false. Some self-promote and are proud; they can be judgemental, gossip since they are nosy and want to know all about you and they call this fellowship! ...and some wreck the lives of others; they invent new doctrines which are astray from the Bible. All of this can be depressing and true believers can, understandingly, be distressed.

Depression and other mental conditions are illnesses just as cancer and heart disease are.

How are we to consider Jonah's attitude to Nineveh and for us today?

The verses in Luke 6.27 apply. We are to love, or respect our enemies and do good to those that hurt us, to bless those who curse us spitefully and to pray for them.. We may all have 'people from Nineveh' in our lives.

# MICAH

## Introduction and Chapter One

Micah lived throughout the reigns of three kings of Judah namely Jotham (742-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-687) and probably prophesied between 737 to 696.

Jotham was a good king. Ahaz was evil. Hezekiah was an able ruler and introduced reforms which had little effect upon the people. It was in Ahaz's reign that there was internal corruption in which he reintroduced the worship of Baal and sacrificed his own children through the fire to Moloch. In the days of Hezekiah people had become unscrupulous.

Micah came from Moresheth and was a contemporary of Hosea, Isaiah and Amos. In fact, Amos came from Tekoah which was only about twenty miles from Moresheth. Micah was a powerful and brave speaker and it is clear that he quoted Isaiah and vice versa. His first prophecy was before the destruction of Samaria in 721.

The book can be divided into three parts

Judgment upon Samaria and Judah (chapters 1 and 2)

The Messiah and salvation (chapters 3 to 5)

The Divine controversy (chapters 6 and 7)

Micah was a common name and it is a shortened version of Micaiah which name means Who is like Jehovah? There are at least seven other Micahs in the Old Testament.

Chapter 1 verse 1 tells us about Micah and that his ministry was to both Samaria and Judah. Verse 2 to 4 is a Divine call for all nations to listen to Adonai Jehovah who speaks from His holy temple. He is to leave the temple and tread upon the high places of the earth. This would be accompanied by an earthquake and storm with volcanic eruptions (see Psalm 18. 6- 15). The mountains would melt before Him and the valleys split. The hills would dissolve like wax and valleys would be cleft by torrential rain. The language may be hyperbolic but it expresses the seriousness of the judgment that is to come. The contrast was the people's sin and the holiness of God. Wrongdoing will never escape the Lord.

Verse 5 has presented problems to some. Jacob was given the name of Israel, and Israel was the sole name given to all the Jews, the people of God. The nation of Israel had split into two kingdoms of Israel and Judah with Samaria the capital of Israel and Jerusalem the capital of Judah which basically consisted of two tribes Judah and Benjamin who were loyal to the house of David. In this verse Jacob is a synonym for the whole of Israel including Judah. The whole nation, both Israel and Judah had rebelled against God and both had accepted Baalim and their high places where idolatrous worship was made. Both Samaria and Jerusalem were to suffer from their sins.

The following two verses describes Samaria before its destruction in 721. The proud and impregnable fortress would be destroyed and left as a heap and when the destruction takes place, vineyards would be still flourish as it would remain a fruitful region.

All the images of idols were destroyed by the Assyrians. These idols had come about partly by the finances of prostitution and there were many Temple prostitutes paid by idolatrous worshippers. In the Old Testament, idolatry is often referred to as spiritual adultery. Today, there is substantial income arising out of pornography.

We should be aware as to whether there are any idols in our lives, that is to say anything that is more important than the Lord. We would do well to recall the words of William Cowper.

The dearest idol I have known  
Whate'er that idol be  
Help me to tear it from Thy throne  
And worship only Thee.

Micah would lament, in accordance with the traditions of his people, uttering dirge-like utterances. When he says that he will walk naked that does not mean nude, but in his undergarments. The word naked is used in Scripture to indicate inadequate clothing and showing one's underwear or what is positionally the same as underwear.

Micah refers to the cries of animals and birds such as the piteous cry of the jackal and the fearful screech of the ostrich. The wound of the people was grievous and incurable and self-inflicted and they would cry out, The day of reckoning would come.

Verses 10 to 12 speak of Gath, Accho, Beth-le-Aphrah, Saphir, Zaanan, Beth-ezel and Maroth. Gath was near Micah's home and the expression Tell it not in Gath probably means that the troubles were so great that there was no point in discussing them. Accho was one of the towns which Israel could not drive out when they conquered Canaan. Beth-le-Aphrah (house of dust) was in the low country known as Shephelah. Saphir means beautiful and was a few miles west of Ashdod who would be humbled display their shame in nakedness. Zaanan would perish by starvation if they did not vacate that city. Beth-ezel would no longer be able to take refugees. The inhabitants of Maroth were on the route of the invading army coming via Lachish and they needed help but no salvation would come.. The coming calamity affected everyone even to the gates of Jerusalem.

The following verses refers to the preparation and speed of the horses and chariots of Lachish. The prophet accuses Lachish of being the beginning of the sin of the daughter of Zion although that sin is not specified. It may be that God's people, being dependent on trade with Egypt and resultant idolatry, or that the northern kingdom called the transgression of Israel had spread idolatry into Judah through Lachish which was a centre of idolatrous systems of worship.

Judah's sins caused Micah to denounce the town of Moresheth-Gath and that the nation would have to give the enemies parting gifts. The town would be given up to the enemy and delivered with the farewell presents of a dowry. The name Achzib means deceit and would become that to the kings of Israel by which Judah is intended. The winter brook of Achzib would fail in the drought (Jeremiah 15.18).

Verses 15 and 16 refer to the conquest. Mareshah was the next town to which Micah turned. This town was close to Gath and Achzib and the conquerors would take this town. Adullam was an ancient city once providing a cave in which David could hide. Perhaps what is meant here is that the aristocracy might find a shelter here.

Judah is represented as a mother sorrowing for her children and are called to mourning by cutting their hair, although this was forbidden by the law (Leviticus 19. 27ff etc).They were to make themselves bald as the gier eagle and go into captivity.

## **Chapter two**

This chapter begins with Divine condemnation of the aristocracy who live in luxury and plan evil while on their beds, They do not hide their evil intents. They use violence to steal land and property with shameless and criminal intent. Micah indicates that as soon as it is light they put their

unscrupulous plans into action. The wealthy landowners would see a field, covet it and set about adding it and perhaps a house to their collection. They oppress the poor and humble man and rob them of their inheritance. Leviticus 25. 13 sets out that in the year of jubilee all properties must revert to their rightful owner. To the farmer the ownership of his land was vital for his livelihood and personal nourishment,

In verses 3 to 5 we are reminded that God sees everything and, as a result, God was devising punishment for these people and disparagingly refers to them as 'this family'. The rich had the power and used it for their own selfish and evil ends but now they would encounter the One with Almighty power who was going to deal with them. They would not be able to even remove their necks from judgment. Necks are quoted to indicate the heavy yoke worn at appropriate times. They walked haughtily and with pride but this would be no more.

This would be a time of retribution and may refer beyond the Assyrian invasion to the conquest by Babylon and a taunt or tense song would spring up from the Jews with wailing and lamentation of utter ruin. What had been allotted to them was no longer theirs but that of the conqueror and his army here called apostates. The rule of the year of jubilee would not now implement the reversion of the land to the original owner.

The prophet's word antagonised the people and they told him not to speak like this (verse 6). They did not believe that the prophesied shame would fall upon them.

There are lessons here for us today. We must not be complacent. The Bible tells us to take heed lest WE fall. (1 Corinthians 10. 12). As Graham Scroggie said, We should live each day as if it were our last. We read, When the Lord comes will He find faith on the earth? People today, even Christians, will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4. 3) but rather embrace new ideas and be modern and trendy.

God's reply comes in verse 7. The people of God owned Jacob as their ancestor. Jacob failed many times but maintained his faith in God. God's promises were to Jacob and not to those who called themselves after his name as they were totally unlike their forefather. It is here said that the Spirit of the Lord was not straitened, not shortened. Did they consider Him to be impatient?

The people threw back an impudent reply as to the prophecy of Micah saying, Are these His doings? God was the unchanging One who promised blessings to their forefather and so how could the prophet's words be true?

Verses 8 and 9 reveal more evil practices. The people were in violation of Divine principles and believed that they were not guilty of any faults. They made God an enemy and were guilty of an uprising against Him. They even removed outer cloaks from people which were usually worn on cold and dark nights. They may have been used as articles of pledge, pending payments of something. Unprotected women and children were being evicted from their homes. The women may be widows and this evil was done to satisfy the avarice of the aristocracy. Perhaps the children were being sold into slavery in a foreign land and would grow up in want and neglect. And all of this was being done by the people that God had blessed.

The land had been a resting place for God's people but it was impossible for it to be so now. The prophet tells the people to arise and go since a sore destruction was coming.

Verse 11 talks of a prophet who comes preaching falsehoods and telling lies even promising wine and strong drink for all and he will be accepted by the people. Today in so-called Christian circles we have false prophets with their false teachings and people accept them and, as a consequence, true

doctrine is ignored and ridiculed. David Pawson, on a tape I have said, Only young people have the answers.

In the last 120 years or so, we have had new doctrines which are man-made and not Biblical including the Pentecostal and charismatic teachings. Then there has been the ecumenical movement, or Churches Together, in which doctrine does not matter and we can all worship together although we have major differences. We have evangelists making lots of money for themselves whereas the Gospel is free and there are 15,000 so called Christian cults in North America. Although of course, it is not Christian and we have physicists and spiritualists prophesying all sorts of things and people believe this.

The final two verses of this chapter contains a sudden promise in the middle of the denunciation of the people. The people were going into exile because of their sins but the remnant of the people will eventually be gathered together. They would be set as a secure flock of sheep in the Edomite city of Bozrah, a city renowned for its large flocks. They would now happily sound like a crowd of men. The Lord Jehovah will go before them and prepare the way. It is said that this may refer to the return from exile in Babylon. It may also refer to a future day when all the twelve tribes of Israel will be restored to their land by their Messiah.

### **Chapter three**

The first four verses deal mainly with the evil princes and those in authority.

It was the responsibility of the rulers to administer the law (Exodus 18. 25ff) and the people were entitled to turn to them. The rulers were responsible for justice but failed disgracefully. They had no sense of what was right or wrong. They were not interested in the community but only in themselves. They did not care for the flock and did not maintain righteousness in the land. Micah calls them cannibals in a graphic and unpleasant way. They should have protected the flock from every adversary and not torn the skin from their backs. Yet in their hour of need, these evil rulers called upon Jehovah. They showed no mercy to their own people and so that the heavens would be as brass to them. Jehovah would not answer them. Their evil deeds meant that they would be shown no mercy.

Even today some people call upon the Lord, including those who do not believe in Him. I have known people go to physics, mediums and spiritualists and, as a last resort, call upon God and some of these callers do not believe in God.

The Biblical principle is that mercy will be shown to those who show mercy.

God and the doctor we adore  
When in trouble, not before.  
The danger past. God is forgotten  
And the doctor slighted.

The next verses deal with false prophets. There are false prophets today and some call themselves Christians. They are always with us. False prophets preach heresy which is defined as provocative teaching which does not agree with the doctrines once and for ever delivered to the saints (Jude 3)

The spiritual leaders of Micah's time did not know, or want to know, the Will of God and Jehovah condemns them for leading His people astray. Those who spiritually lead the people have a great responsibility and if they teach false doctrine or improper practices then they will bear the responsibility of their errors. As in Micah's day, false prophets are governed by what benefit they will receive and I know such who bite with their teeth and say, Peace. I have met modern day ' prophets' who are aggressive and offensive and deny the Word of God. They insist that they are the only ones

who are right and only they have all the correct and appropriate doctrines. Their words are hollow and they do not have the authority of the Scriptures. It is a time for the truth and the faith once and for ever delivered to believers and yet people do not want the old ways, which the Lord tells us to follow, but rather to follow new ways some of which could be classed as sensational although certainly not Biblical.

The day of reckoning was coming for these false prophets as it will for all false prophets. Micah declares that they will not be able to divine any more. They would live in darkness and not be able to see. Day would become night for these evil prophets. The word that describes the prophecies of these false prophets is *kasam*, a word only used of magic, soothsayers and necromancy and the use of mediums. It is never used of real prophecy. These false prophets shall be put to shame and, as diviners, they would be judged. They had claimed to be spokesman for Jehovah but now they will be exposed for what they are.

The same fate will await the false prophets of today and if one examines the teachings of some of these people one can only despair at such falsehoods. The final chapter of the New Testament gives a stern warning against those who add or take away from what the Bible says.

In verse 8, Micah declares himself to be a true prophet because the Spirit of Jehovah is in him and he is telling both Israel and Judah of their sins and transgressions. There are no platitudes in his speaking. His mission was to bring God's people to their knees admitting their sins. There is a need of men like Micah today.

We turn now from the prophets to the civil leaders who will not administer justice but have perverted it. Some of the injustices led to deaths and the shedding of innocent blood but, as other prophets have said, they had no sense or regard for social justice. Their prosperity and lavish houses were paid for by their persecution of others.

In verses 11 and 12, Micah identifies the root cause of most of these problems and that cause is money. Those responsible for the law were subject to bribery and personal gain. They would allow any improper action if they could make a financial gain. The priests were no better. As Malachi 2. 7 states they were to teach the Torah for the benefit of all and in the fear of God. Yet they were charging for their services and sought a fee for any consultation. There are organisations that do this today with words such as, If you want my help, you will have to pay for it. These prophets would only prophesy for money and say what the people wanted to hear, but they would not reveal the will of Jehovah.

In our day they are churches, maybe the majority of them, would do not uphold the faith once and forever delivered to the saints, nor follow the old ways recommended by the Lord and do not teach Biblical truth.

I went to a church recently and the subject of the sermon was given in advance, Are doughnuts more enjoyable than going to church?

The people of Micah's time stated that Jehovah was in the midst of them and so no judgment would come upon them. But, because of their conduct, destruction would fall upon Jerusalem, also known as Zion. The wicked people had a false confidence. Their hypocrisy was intolerable to the Lord. Micah uses some sarcasm when he says, For your sake Zion shall be ploughed as a field. It was because of sin that Zion would be ploughed as a field and the holy city would be reduced to rubble. Micah's prophesy was quoted by Jeremiah (chapter 36. 18). The hill of Moriah where the temple had stood in its glory would become a forest.

## **Chapter four**

In amongst the details of the destruction of Jerusalem, we have welcome news of a forthcoming age of blessing described as being in the latter days, a term used with regard to the last days and the second coming and following events.

Moriah was the highest mountain in the country upon which the original temple was built. In a day to come, the temple will be rebuilt at that location and people will flock to it. It should be noted that the temple is not a centre for worship but as a revelation of God. The nations will flock to it because God will be there. People will come for instruction and learn to walk in God's paths. Righteousness will issue from Jerusalem. This is at the time of the millennium, Christ's thousand year reign on earth (Revelation 5. 3 ff)

Verses 3-4 remind us that the rulers, judges and priests of Micah's time has shown their worthlessness. But in a day to come, a Supreme Judge will rule in righteousness, His rule even extending to other nations who will gladly submit to His authority. Swords and spears will be replaced by domestic implements. There will be no war or conflict since the Lord will establish peace and security. for His thousand year reign. Every man will sit under his own fig tree or vine, a picture of happiness, relaxation and peaceful tranquillity. Fear will be no more in this literal reign of Jehovah on the earth. This is the Messianic era (Revelation 5).

The modern church is often astray. We are to earnestly contend for the faith once and for all ever delivered by the saints ( Jude 3 ) and to walk in God's ways ( Psalm 28, 1, Isaiah 30.21, 1 John 1 5-7). Nor are we to add new doctrines as the last chapter of the Bible warns us. In view of our testimony and the second coming we must adhere to such things.

People of other nations who worship other gods and who will reflect both the characteristics of their religion and culture but, by contrast, Judah will fix her eyes upon Jehovah who, in days to come, they will follow Him for ever and ever. There is a future for God's people and it will be a glorious one.

The compassion of the Lord is shown in the next two verses. As in Zephaniah 3.19, He will assemble the lame and this may be a reference to their forefather Jacob whose descendants were often considered spiritually lame. The Lord will gather them together as a remnant which word usually refers to those who have remained faithful to Jehovah. We read that God is full of compassion, which compassion does not fail. We have only to look at the compassion of Christ to see this (Mark 1.41, 5.19. Luke 7.11)

In the dispersion, the Jews suffered. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the people were subjected to many indignities and abuse. The old were left to die in misery. The able-bodied were driven like cattle into exile rigorously and many died en route. Women and children were often left by the wayside. Those who arrived were usually bruised, broken and exhausted and probably a small percentage of those had started the journey.

Verses 11 to 13 speak of the nation's fate which would attract the attention of the heathen nations. There was no pity for the doomed nation which had been holiness unto the Lord but now was to become the laughing stock. Even in our times the Jews are subject to abuse and ridicule but for the surrounding nations to say that the Jews did not know the ways of Jehovah neither did the heathen nations. They did not realise that God was gathering them together in the threshing floor to be flailed and trodden down. Nor did they realise that their own fate would be sealed.

The prophet reminds us of the oxen treading down the corn ( Deuteronomy 25.4 ).There is a picture here of the day when Judah will tread down her enemies. Judah's hoofs would be as strong as military bronze and the horn to toss the chaff would be of iron. They would trample down and break in pieces their foes.

And the Divine purposes cannot be frustrated. In recent times Israel has been condemned for defending itself against their enemies but, ultimately, they will be victorious and defeat all their enemies. The world will see the power and authority of God and all the enemies and those who hate the Jews will be humbled and pay for their hatred of God's people. It is deplorable that in the politics of the UK we have those who hate Jews and are also atheists. But one day all of these will bow the knee to the Lord Jesus and be humiliated for their oppression of God's people.

## **Chapter five**

The first verse belongs to the end of chapter four since it probably deals with the siege of Jerusalem who is regularly called daughter. The ruler of God's people is also called the Judge of Israel who will be smitten on the cheek with a rod. That Judah and Israel are often synonymous with each other it may be difficult to interpret this passage.

The second verse is one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible telling the location of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem Ephratah. There was another Bethlehem of the tribe of Zebulun but the town of which Micah spoke was a smaller town known as the town of David (1 Samuel 17.12) and his ancestors. When Herod asked where this Child was to be born he was told, 'In Bethlehem of Judea for as it is written in the prophets, "And you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah are not the least among the princes of Judea for out of you shall come a Governor, who shall rule my people wisely" (Matthew 2. 4 to 6). Micah goes further and says of this Child that His goings forth have been of old, from the days of eternity. He was from eternity since He is the Eternal Word of God who became flesh, became a person, since a person has a body of flesh and bones, whereas a Spirit does not have a body and cannot be called a person although some call the Trinity three persons.

This small town was to be the birthplace of the One who one day to rule all Israel although many would have thought that Jerusalem should be the birthplace of the Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

A criticism of this book is that the prophet flits from one subject to another but this particular prophecy is of immense importance.

Micah returns to things of his time. Because of Judah's apostasy and infidelity that He will give them up until the time when the remnant will return from exile. He likens this to a woman awaiting the birth of her child (verse 3).

Verses 4 to 6 returns to the Messiah as shepherd caring for His flock and when He shall govern at a later time. He will provide their every need, protect them from danger, leading them into the best pasture, healing their wounds satisfying their thirst and would be the Good Shepherd. They will dwell in peace and security.

There is now a reference to the Assyrians who would ravage the palaces and strongholds and how the Jews will raise up seven shepherds and eight princes from among the men. This probably refers to the future as indicated by the King of the north (Daniel 11 40 -45). The land of Nimrod would be taken by the Jews. Nimrod was the founder of Babylon. The reference to seven and eight may not mean much but indicates the strength of the victors and leaders of Israel. All the enemies of God including atheists and the anti Semetic individuals will be defeated and humiliated. -All the UK politicians who are pro-Arab and hate the Jews will be utterly discredited.

Verses 7 to 9 refers to the scattering of the Jewish people among many nations following the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem by the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively. They are often called the remnant.

Micah is here speaking of a time to come when Israel will be a nation again and be mightily blessed as dew from Jehovah and as fresh showers upon the grass. The title Israel refers to both the Old Testament kingdoms of both Israel and Judah. Israel will be established as the supreme nation upon the earth because the Lord Jesus will be the Supreme Ruler. This revived nation will be called the remnant of Jacob and the word remnant often refers to those who will turn to God in repentance and be saved. It is interesting to note that when Jacob received blessing, it was described as the dew from heaven (Genesis 27.28). The dew was essential to prevent the ground being dried up, plants being scorched and vegetation withered.

Israel had been like a lion among the beasts of the forest or a young lion among a flock of sheep, displaced or in the wrong place. The Jews will trample down the many nations as a lion tears its prey. The Lord's people will ultimately be victorious over all their enemies. The word heathen is implied here and describes those who do not believe in the God of the Bible, the Lord Jesus and also to those who hate the Jews.

Verses 10 to 15 continues with the forecast of the blessing for Israel and the destruction of all things that Israel relied on rather than acknowledge the all-sufficiency of God. All military supplies and armaments used to defend themselves will no longer be required. And their ridiculous beliefs in witchcraft, mediums, spiritualists and other idolatry would be no more. The victory over all the enemies would be achieved by Messiah Himself. All idols will be no more and the cities that majored on such idolatry would also be destroyed and the worship of false gods would be no more.

Jeroboam I had introduced the worship of the golden calves in the northern kingdom which idolatry had been adopted by the southern kingdom. This was a gross insult to Jehovah. There were also pillars of wood and metal to the goddess of nature (Exodus 34,13, Deuteronomy 16.21ff and 27.15) as in much pagan religion of our day

The Lord would root out the Asherim and their cities. Asherim means groves noted for its wooden posts close to the altars of these false deities representing the goddess Asherah or Ishtar whom the people had been told by God to destroy when they entered the Promised Land ( Exodus 34.13)

Divine punishment would be meted out to all heathen nations because they persecuted God's people. We read in Jeremiah 10. 7 that Jehovah is the King of al Nations. That will be.

## **Chapter six**

Micah likens the mountains and hills to an independent jury and Jehovah has called the nation to Court and acts as both prosecutor and defendant. The mountains are often used in Scripture to witness events in Israel's history, or to rejoice on blessing or listen to Divine proclamations (Deuteronomy 32.1, Isaiah 1. 2, 44.23, 49. 13, 55,12 etc). The Lord has a controversy with His people and, in this lawsuit, He invites Israel to plead her case and this speaks of Isaiah 1. 18 where the Lord says to His people, Come now and let us reason together though your sin be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as white as wool. God had every right to be full of indignation and anger towards His wicked and idolatrous people. Instead He here uses tender expressions and requests an answer to His questions, What wrong have I done to you and how have I wearied you? He wants to know how he has tried their patience. He had redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt and given them leaders such as Moses, Aaron and Miriam. The people owed their nation to Him and they should show Him their thankfulness. There is a warning here for us. Do we value what Christ has done for us? Do we now accept it but also show ingratitude and ignore the style of life He directs that we are to follow? Going to meetings to worship and remember Him does it really mean something? Why is it that modern churches and fellowships do not adhere the ways that the Lord has established and become worldly and trendy? Self expression and doing things our way is not the Lord's way. We are not to preach self and talk about ourselves and what we have done (2

Corinthians 4. 5) In all things Christ must have the pre-eminence (Colossians 1.18), note carefully HE MUST. Christian worship is the worship of Christ. In some modern churches the pastor is idolised, the pop group are admired and sometimes almost hysterically and someone may talk about their holiday in Kenya and how doughnuts are more tasty than going to church, what was discussed at Conference and how three year old Jenny has spoken in tongues, how Mrs Jones used her gift of healing to cure Daisy of her terminal cancer followed by a rapturous round of applause and cheering.

I have listened to all such things with the emphasis on people and not the Lord. Verse 5 shows us that the Lord not only provided protection and leadership from Egypt to Canaan but quotes, as an example, the story of Balak, king of Moab, and for the second time used the tender expression, O my people. In Canaan, Israel was attacked by the Amorites but defeated them and moved on to the Moabite plain near Jericho. The Midianites and the Moabites got together to determine what to do about the invasion of their lands. They consulted a soothsayer named Balaam to lay a curse upon Israel and Balak would financially reward him. Ultimately, Balaam used pagan women to seduce Israel, an evil scheme which proved successful (Numbers 25, 1 - 8, 31. 16). Balak dismissed Baalim. Numbers 25. 1 states that Israel stayed in Shittim, the last station before they crossed the river Jordan and the sexual immorality took place. The Lord punished them severely (Numbers 25. 4-9) but did not reject them. The curse was rolled away at Gilgal and circumcision was reintroduced (Joshua 5. 3-9).

Jehovah's requirements are set out in verses 6 to 8 and shows that the people did not understand Him and had neglected Him so long and did not appreciate Him. Did the Lord want His people to come before Him with burnt offerings with ten thousand rams and a plentitude of oil? Should they sacrifice their firstborn to atone for all their sins? Sarcasm is here. God is satisfied with nothing less than holiness in man (Exodus 19.6, Leviticus 11. 44. 19.2) and, before the usual complaint is made that this is Old Testament, see 1 Peter 1 15-16.

What did the Lord require of His people? What does he require of us?

To exercise justice, which implies more than the letter of the law, and to set right whatever is wrong and, in daily life, walking in integrity and faithfully before God. To love mercy and kindness which means unselfish deeds and consistent performances of acts of kindness to others. To walk humbly means personal conduct of modesty with personal purity and chastity. There is no room for self promotion and pride.

Verse 9 is important. The voice of Jehovah was to denounce the city for both its evil ways and idolatry and how the people should heed what He says and realise that the rod of punishment was necessary. There is also the message to revere Him and His Name.

Reverence is missing from so many churches and fellowships today. How often were people to take off their shoes for they stood on holy ground? The fear of God was the respect to be shown to Him at all times and Habakkuk 2.20 reminds who the Lord is to be honoured and that the earth should be silent before Him. Isaiah 30. 15 tells us that in quietness and confidence is our strength but people took no notice. It is the same today. There must be reverence shown to the Lord Jesus and to the Word of God (Proverbs 30.6, Revelation 22. 19). But these essentials are not heeded today.

Ernest Lloyd of Christian Witness to Israel was invited to speak at a meeting in South Africa. The meeting began with 45 minutes of modern songs, a very loud pop group and flashing lights and the Police arrived because the noise was far too much. Ernest, who had travelled from the UK, was given five minutes to speak and he said that God was not deaf!

As in the prophecy of Amos, Micah now deals with social injustice. The treasures of the traders of Jerusalem have been accumulated by dishonesty and the Lord calls them the treasures of wickedness

found in the houses of the wicked. False scales and weights were being used. How could these deceptions be glossed over? Such dishonesty was accompanied by lies, oppression and violence and all of this had to be corrected by punishment.

This is borne out by the final two verses of this chapter. Divine punishment was inescapable. The people were desolate because of their sins and there was no repentance and they had persisted in sin. They had already been smitten. They would eat but not be satisfied and still empty which could easily refer to the conditions of the besieged and starving city. There was no place of safety where they could be put safely away and therefore there would be no salvation and what is tried to be hidden will perish by the sword or become the spoils of the invaders. They would sow crops but not reap the harvest since the enemy would take it; olives would be prepared but they would not use the oil and even when the grapes are trodden they would not enjoy the resultant wine. The people had followed Omri and his son Ahab. Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord to a greater extent than his predecessors (1 Kings 16.25). He built the city of Samaria and founded the powerful dynasty of the northern kingdom with its oppression and injustice.

Ahab was responsible for the devilment of the worship of the gods of Baal and following his marriage to Jezebel built a temple to Baal and erected an altar for the worship of Baal. In order to have the vineyard of Naboth, he had him murdered (1 Kings 21 1-16). It must be remembered that Solomon was evil and built temples to pagan gods such as Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Moloch (1 Kings 11 5-7) which God calls abominations. Solomon was an idolater and a womaniser and I cannot understand why some call him a type of Christ.

God is aware of all that we say and do and how our heart is before Him. In the last analysis it is our reverence and love for Him that is the most important aspect of our lives.

## **Chapter seven**

The chapter begins with a woe, an expression only used in one other place in the Old Testament in Job 10.15.

Micah portrays himself and the nation as someone wandering through the fields looking for something to satisfy his hunger. But the harvest has already been reaped and there are no gleanings left. All the summer fruits has been gathered in, and there is nothing to eat. Jerusalem was also desolate in that the orchards and vineyards were empty. The first figs appeared in June and were the most tasty but the final picking had taken place. If anything was left, it was worthless. The situation was hopeless as was the fate of Jerusalem which had no piety (verses 2 and 3). Godly men were no longer on the earth. Neither are there any upright men but there were those who were unkind and indeed cruel to everyone including their own brothers. They wait for them with a net and will even shed their blood. These were days of anarchy and all of this was unacceptable to Jehovah. No wonder that there had to be Divine punishment.

In the UK today, there continues to be a rapid decline in Christianity even among some who call themselves Christians. Secularism and selfishness is the order of the day and even the government is dismissing Christian values and virtues. Marriage has no sanctity and gay marriages are regarded as normal. Television and the cinema is usually violent and contains sexuality and blasphemy. The rights of homosexuals are now paramount. If we speak against homosexuality we are called homophobic and can be arrested and yet people are allowed to speak against Christianity and Christ. Many churches do not preach the Gospel or adhere to sound Biblical teaching; some modern churches call Sunday Funday and there is gossip over coffee usually after meetings which is prevalent and tends to wash away any spiritual content. Fellowship is often mere nosiness and church activities are often worldly and not spiritual. It is true that spirituality and entertainment do not mix.

Many people go to church for the entertainment, the pop music, the dancing and drama and monologues about individuals.

The people of Micah's day commit evil with both hands. Judges and members of the royal household accept bribes. Those in authority and power plot and weave their plans to satisfy their evil desires. As a result, they are rightly denounced in verse 4 and Micah states that the day of visitation and reckoning is coming. The people of Jerusalem are like a briar and those who may be considered upright are sharper than a thorn hedge. The rulers and judges who were to protect the people under Jehovah, but their wickedness made them no better than the briar and the thorn hedge as they tore to shreds the people,

The watchmen here refer to the prophets (Isaiah 21.6, Jeremiah 6.17, Hosea 2.11) and visitation was also to come upon them who had not condemned the sins of the people. Is this true in some churches and society today? Are those who preach falsehood and add to the Scriptures or take away from them, false prophets? What will the Lord do to them?

The treachery existed in families. One could not trust a neighbour or have confidence in a friend. They had to be careful what they said even with very close friends. In a family, you will find a son who despised his father and the daughter who hates her mother and the daughter-in-law who is against her mother-in-law. Enemies include those in the same house and family. This was because the deceit was universally widespread and everyone could be treacherous. Normally the Jewish wife would never betray her husband but things were different now. Children no longer had respect for their parents. There was active antagonism in the home and social rebellion. We may well compare it to teenage rebellion of today which blossomed in the liberal 1960s.

History repeats itself and, no doubt, such conditions will be seen in future days. As we have stated there have been displays of these rebellious conditions already, particularly in the 1960s.

Verse 7 tells us that the prophet has become the mouthpiece for the faithful in the nation. In these appalling situations of constant evil and rife idolatry, the faithful looked to Jehovah knowing that He will hear their cry. They had confidence in the Lord even though He was to exercise Divine judgment.

What an assurance this is for us today. We can always turn to Him assured that He will hear us in all and every situation in life.

The enemy comes into the spotlight again in the next verse. God's people were fully aware of the threat of invasion and, as a nation, were weak and that the enemies may rejoice over them with malignant joy. There is a message of hope that, although calamity would come and bring the nation into darkness of affliction (Isaiah 8.22, 9.1), Jehovah would eventually deliver His people.

Is this not the case today? We can still trust in God through the trials of life. We may have no answers to prayers which may well be frustrating particularly concerning the salvation of family and loved ones and we are deeply worried that they may not accept Christ.

Verses 9 and 10 remind us of Divine judgment. Because of Judah's sin, it was only fitting that they should be punished. God had used other nations to inflict them and the people did not question His action. They expressed their readiness to bear the punishment which they deserved (2 Samuel 16.10). However, God would plead their cause against the enemy. He would ultimately vindicate Judah before His enemies and protect those in a covenant relationship with Him and, eventually, there would be deliverance and they would be brought into the light.

The enemy had sarcastically asked Where is your God? But He would bring shame upon them as she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets

A Divine purpose is now revealed for the future blessing of God's people. The walls of the city would be rebuilt and the boundaries would be extended between the fields and the vineyards. In days still yet to come, peoples from Assyria and Egypt and from sea to sea will come to view the results of God's blessing. Such an area may be from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf and from Sinai to Lebanon and probably from all parts of the world to see the Lord reigning in Jerusalem in the millennium. That the earth will be desolate may refer to the heathen world in general, who, because of their affliction of Israel, will not experience the same blessing on their lands.

Verses 14 and 15 deals with the Shepherd and His flock and seems to be Micah's prayer to the Shepherd of Israel for the people and the restoration of their lands. It is a plea that Jehovah will shepherd His flock with His rod. The rod was used to lead the sheep out of the fold into pasture or to the brook to drink, to protect them from wild animals, to rescue them from danger or to urge them to move more quickly. All of this showed His compassion for the sheep.

The prophet refers to God's people as sheep as living alone in a beautiful land. Living alone is often portrayed in this sense (Numbers 23.9 etc). Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old pleads the prophet. These two provinces were overrun by Tiglath-Pileser II of Assyria in 734 BC and these areas are two that should be restored to Israel. The Divine reply was that Jehovah had delivered His people from Egypt and had continually looked after them with innumerable blessings. His power had not changed nor had His purpose for His people. What He had pledged He would perform.

The following two verses tells us that the nations had relied on their military strength and confidence in their own power. But now, God's arm had reached out over them and the watching nations were both alarmed and ashamed that their own strength was completely ineffective to thwart the deliverance of Israel. They would put their hand on their mouth which was a gesture of reverence and astonishment (Job 21.5, Isaiah 52.15). They were speechless in the presence of Divine power and deaf to everything else. They were so debased that they would lick the dust like the serpent, an expression of humiliating defeat (Psalm 72. 9, Isaiah 49.23).

Micah refers to them as creeping out of the strongholds to which they had fled because of their terror of Jehovah. They were no better than the worms coming out of their holes in the ground (Psalm 18.45) such was their fear of the might of the Lord. No one and nothing who attack the people of God will be spared His righteous judgment.

The final two verses of this prophecy are verses of comfort and assurance. God is merciful, pardoning iniquity and passing by transgressions of the remnant of His people. He will not keep His justified anger for ever as He delights in loving-kindness. He will turn and have compassion upon His people whom He still loves. He will tread under foot their iniquities and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. His faithfulness will bless the descendants of Jacob and will be seen and the loving-kindness will be displayed to the descendants of Abraham as He swore of old.

This is Micah's hymn of praise to the Mighty One, the incomparable Lord. Who can compare with Him? That some do is an insult to the eternal God. Who else has such love and mercy?

All their sins would be cast into the depths of the sea and I remember Canon Guy King of Beckenham saying, And God puts up a notice, No fishing !

The doctrine of forgiven and mercy is also expressed to the Jews in the anonymous epistle to the Hebrews in chapter 10 and verse 17

Great God of wonders all Thy ways  
Are righteous matchless and Divine,  
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace,

Most marvellous, unrivalled, shine.  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

## NAHUM

Nahum is another neglected book and yet these three chapters contain some inspiring and uplifting verses.

1 v 3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power

1 v 7 The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, an enormous city with a circumference of some eight miles and with a population of 300,000. The river Tigris ran by its western side and it was surrounded by moats 150 foot wide. It was a wealthy city and a commercial centre.

Assyria was a plague to the kingdom of Israel and invaded them in 722 BC deporting most of its people. The kingdom of Judah became a vassal state and Hezekiah had to pay heavy tribute to Sennacherib of Assyria.

The date of this book is probably between 663 BC and 612 BC or thereabouts. In chapter 3. 8-10 the prophet makes mention of the destruction of Thebes which was about 663BC but does not mention that city's restoration in 654BC.

The name Nahum means comfort and we know nothing about him.

We recall that Jonah in the 9th century reluctantly went to the evil city of Nineveh and they repented. The date of his prophecy is said to be around 862 BC, perhaps as much as two centuries earlier than Nahum. Most people refer to Jonah's visit as a century or more earlier.

The word of the Lord came to Nahum stating that God is jealous and He is to punish Nineveh and all the enemies of His people and that He could not hold his anger any longer. But He is slow to anger and great in power. He does not act rashly or impetuously. On the other hand, God will not let the wicked get away with it. He is the God that is righteous and He is the God of justice. He is in control and even the clouds, whirlwinds are no obstacle to Him. He controls the seas and rivers and nature itself; the flowers languish if it is His will. Mountains and hills quake at Him and the world is in His hands. He is the Divine Creator and the Sustainer of creation.

A few more comments should be made. People do not understand why God should be jealous. Because He loves His people, He is not prepared to tolerate any rival and therefore He rightly claims the devotion of His own. Nineveh was a pagan city and like heathen people everywhere they want to persecute Jews and Christians, hating the morality of the Bible.

Nineveh is to be made to suffer the agony and disgrace and destruction she has inflicted upon others. She has taken kings captive and now her own royalty will be taken away (2.8). She will suffer siege having laid sieges against a hundred cities herself (3.14). She has spoiled others; now she is to be spoiled (2.10). She has massacred many and now the number of her own slain will be a staggering figure (3.3). She has burned many cities and now her own palaces and homes will be so destroyed (3.15). She has ruined cities by flooding and now she will suffer the same fate (2.7). She has left cities in ruins and now desolation will overtake her (2.11). With cruelty and insensitivity she has scattered people and now she will be dispersed beyond the possibility of reunion (3. 16-18), The humiliation she has brought to captains of opposing armies will result in her being a gazing stock (3.6). She was responsible for many fleeing for their lives but now an utter end will be made of her (1.8).

And these things are still relevant today. God loves His people, Jews and Christians, and even those who do not acknowledge Him. His will is that all men (and women) everywhere repent and accept the

Lord Jesus as Saviour. He is not willing that any should perish. He is still the jealous God who will not tolerate any rival whether it is another god or a political or ideological belief or the new car or house. That which is contrary to His will and His morality will never gain His approval and Christians should not entertain such matters either. God takes account of all that we do and He is not deceived.

The judgement will fall on Bashan with its rich and fertile land and Carmel as well for its fertile ground. But alongside this judgement there is Divine mercy for His people. He will not neglect or forget them and that applies to believers today although we may not always realise it.

As for Nineveh the city, it vanished without trace and the surviving people were scattered. Assyria became no more.

Nineveh had repented in response to Jonah's preaching but in Nahum's time there was no opportunity for them to have another chance. They were spared before in the great mercy of God but their change of heart did not last. Chapter 1. 9 hints at some possible action from Assyria or that these words were addressed to the people of Judah who feared what might happen. What is clear is that Nineveh would come to a complete end. Verse 10 states that they will be trapped by thorns and tangled and consumed like dry stubble in a fire. There would be no escape. God's will and power cannot be broken.

The following verse talks about someone in Nineveh who is plotting evil against Judah, a so-called counsellor of Beliah. This is probably a reference to the past when Judah under Hezekiah was a vassal to Assyria paying heavy tribute to their king Sennacherib. Hezekiah revolted against this (2 Kings 18, 7) and the Assyrians invaded Judah. Eventually, the invaders were defeated by the angel of the Lord (2 Kings 18.33 to 19.37).

Sennacherib was a cruel, evil and ruthless man and, like many today, despised the Jews and, also in our day, people despise Christians who may be the second most persecuted people on earth. All such oppressors will be judged by the Lord in days to come when everyone will bow the knee to the Lord Jesus and confess that He is Lord. We are in a battle and may suffer defeats but the ultimate victory will be ours. We would all wish that our oppressors and tormentors would be dealt with both now and effectively.

Judah's deliverance is the theme of verses 12 and 13. Sennacherib's army was very powerful and, as we said above, his army was completely routed in 701BC with army casualties totalling 135,000. The Lord often used foreign powers to punish His people for their evil ways and this must be appreciated with two facts namely that God loved His people with an everlasting love and would not entertain any rival, but His people were sometimes disloyal, fickle and evil. His people had innumerable benefits from the Lord and, to say the least, were ungrateful and dismissive of Him.

Sennacherib had been defeated and now perhaps 50 to 60 years later the Assyrians were to be cut down despite their strength and, although God has afflicted His people with justifiable punishment before, He will not do it again provided they will be true to Him. The burden and yoke will be removed and the Jews will be free.

The prophet seems to be quickly moving between Assyria and Judah. In verse 14 the name of Assyria will not be sown and their pagan and evil gods will be forgotten. Assyria will die and their graves be unknown. Nothing would perpetuate their name. What Assyria sowed she reaped and that is the same with us all. Every believer must face the assessment of his own life and works (2 Corinthians 5 9-10) and this should exercise us now instead of waiting for that day. This is one reason why in verse 15 God's people are called to fulfil their vows and Judah was to celebrate their festivals. Personally, I do not like the word celebrate as it suggests in our day a party and it is how Catholics refer to the Mass.

Jewish festivals were the acknowledgement and remembrance of God and His goodness and a means of worship. And there are still Christians who do not realise that the Lord desires fellowship with us and to receive our worship. He does not want our life story and testimony or our self-promotion. He does not want our self-expression in music and dance, the raising of arms and the latest worship songs which are often both irrelevant and inane.

Micah 6. 8 tells us what the Lord requires of us and that is that we are just and show mercy and that we are to be humble in our walk, which is our life, with God. The epistle to James reminds us that God resists the proud and the apostle Paul tells us not to preach or proclaim self but the Lord Jesus. Leith Samuel in speaking on Ephesians reminded us that we must be filled with the Spirit but that cannot be if there is self.

The glad tidings of Nahum 1.15 was that while Judah felt under threat from the Assyrians, which caused the decline of worship, now, because the enemy was to be defeated, they could once again enjoy fellowship with God and the worship of Him.

It is sad today that so many people regard worship as a social or community event which must be modern and trendy but worship or worthship is the reverential acceptance of the greatness of God and His love and mercy towards us. Isaiah 30.15 states that in quietness and confidence is our strength. Hebrews 12.28 says that we serve God with reverence and godly fear, that is to say respect.

Chapter 2 begins with the approach of the Assyrian army and Nahum was telling the Ninevites to make preparations to resist the foe. They had destroyed other countries and now they were to be put to the test. God was restoring the glory of both Israel and Judah. It may also refer to a coming day still ahead in the future when the two Jewish kingdoms will be united in the land covenanted to them and there will be a new Temple in Jerusalem where the Lord will reign for a thousand years.

A coalition of armies attacked Nineveh and it was sacked in 612 BC. The soldiers were blooded and the chariots careered madly in the streets. It was chaos and carnage. This devastation is continued in the following chapter; the suburbs are overrun and people stumbled over each other; the walls of the city are breached with battering rams and the men using them had a covering to protect them from any falling missiles.

I take it that Huzzab in verse 7 is the queen of Nineveh and she and her ladies in waiting are agitated and drumming on their breasts. Nineveh is now flooded and like a pool of water and the inhabitants are fleeing in terror and for their own safety. Even when others suggest they halt and not panic, they do not turn back but keep running. The city being abandoned to some extent and so there was looting of an abundance of precious items. A few decades earlier, the Medes and the Babylonians ransacked the city and stripped it of its treasures.

With this coalition army there would be desolation and dilapidation. Fear caused the knocking of knees and heart irregularities, anguish in the abdomen and shock shown upon their pale faces. The inhabitants were completely helpless. The courage and pomp had gone and fear was also probably shown in rapid breathing. Fear can cause internal pain. Nerves would be in uncontrollable disorder. There would be over-active hearts and throbbing blood vessels. (2.10).

In verses 11 and 13, there is a reference to lions and their dens and how the lions fill the caves with prey as torn carcasses. The Lord likens the capture prey of the lions to the Assyrians who will be cut off never to be heard again.

During the time of Ashurbanipal, lions had become frequent in Assyria and were a danger and they were also featured in the sculpture of the nations. Some Assyrian leaders likened themselves to lions as did Sennacherib who said, "Like a lion, I raged."

The lion is known for its rapacity and its fierceness. Now the Assyrians would face the anger and wrath of God. Their cruelty was to be paid for. Their hatred of God's people would end in their total destruction.

No weapon lifted against the people of God will prosper. And the increasing persecution of Jews and Christians today is apparent. The psalmist said, Princes have persecuted me without a cause (Psalm 119.161).

Mark 13, from verse 9 tells of the persecution of early Christians and verse 13 says that they will be persecuted because they own the name of the Lord. Luke 6.22 reads, Blessed are ye when men hate you and will not keep company with you and cast you out and despise you for My Name's sake. Christians are hated because people hate the Lord, His teaching and His morality. Persecution is inevitable. We are sheep among wolves. The Lord's message to one of the churches in Revelation 2 verse 3 talks about Christians who have borne trouble with patience and worked hard in Christian service and not given up.

The hymn says

Who suffer with the Lord below  
Shall reign with Him above.

The third and final chapter begins with the pronouncement of woe on Nineveh, the city of blood. Its destruction was justified because of its shocking iniquity. It was full of lies, broken treaties in which nations were deluded. It dealt with pledges which they did not keep to the chagrin of other nations. They were ruthless and arrogant in business as well as warfare. Now they were the prey and they could not escape.

The dead were in the streets. There the sounds of whips, rumblings and crashing chariots and people falling over multitudes of corpses (Verses 2 and 3).

Adultery and fornication is often used in the Old Testament to describe the unfaithfulness of both Israel and Judah and this deception is used by Nahum to indicate the deceptions of Nineveh. She had used her glamorous and attractiveness to seduce and misled many nations just as a prostitute would entice a client. There is also a condemnation of sorceries that is to say witchcraft. The Bible condemns all forms of witchcraft, spiritualism, divination, necromancy and sorcery.

There are many verses to this effect such as Deuteronomy 18. 9ff and notice mediums are included. The Assyrians often used these features to achieve their goals. Today there are countless people involved in such things and often people are deluded and deceived and their health and well-being declines.

Verses 5 to 7 are distressing but relevant. It was a shame for an eastern woman to show what she wore under her dress or skirt, as it is for any decent woman, since only a harlot would do that which is defined by God as nakedness. In Exodus 20 you could not go up the steps to the altar since you could see the nakedness of those in front of you and to see up someone's skirt or tunic was to see their nakedness. In Isaiah 47, Babylon is likened to a woman showing her bare thighs and God calls that nakedness. The modesty of women is a Biblical theme and it is stated so that decent women would not be considered as immoral and that modesty was to aid their protection from immoral men. It is true that in our day women dress provocatively and this does ensnare normal red-blooded men to take advantage of women and the consensus of opinion is that women are also to blame for many sexual attacks because of how they dress, Of course, it does not condone any man from violent attacks on women. If you see how young women dress in the pop music industry and in pornography then

they are degrading all women and advertising sex and immorality. As the prophet says such people are a gazing stock.

In God's sight, such things are sinful and an abomination. They are vile (verse 6). In Malachi 2.3 God says that He will pelt her with loathsome filth. Nakedness and scantily clad people were often paraded by the Assyrians so that men, women and children would be exposed and shamed.

Verses 8 to 10 describe the fate Of Thebes which had been defeated by the Assyrians. It was a great and ancient city situated on the Nile with some magnificent temples. It took the name No-Amon after a sun-god worshipped by the Egyptians but the Greeks later renamed it as Thebes.

This city fell to Ashurbanipal and the inhabitants of the city were cruelly treated. Many were taken as slaves into captivity. Infants and children were smashed to pieces at street corners (2 Kings 8.12).

When you think of these horrors then you must conclude that God was right to punish them. Now they were to drink of God's wrath.

There are always manifold problems in cities which you seldom get in the country and country towns. Cities and big towns have high rates of crime, prostitution and drunkenness (verse 11 and 12). People that are drunk usually behave irrationally. Now the Ninevites were to drink of God's wrath. Even their fortresses were like fig trees losing their fruit just as blows of the invaders would fall on them.

The Assyrian soldiers were now like women and the city is wide open. Fire burns on the bars of the gates (verse 13). The situation is hopeless. The reference to women is not degrading to them but to indicate effeminacy. Effeminacy and homosexuality is condemned in the Bible (Isaiah 19.16, Jeremiah 50. 37 etc... Leviticus 20.13, Romans 1.23ff). It is also interesting to note that in Amos 2.16 we read of soldiers running away naked. It does not mean that they were nude but scantily dressed having thrown off their armour.

As the walls of the city were being destroyed water and clay was needed to make the mould for new bricks. Building repairs was an essential but this would not help. Fires would be out of control and the sword and other weapons be devastating despite the army and auxiliaries being increased as if they were a swarm of locusts (verses 14 and 15).

The following verses talk of merchants and captains. Trade had increased more than the stars of heaven but like the locust such trade is stripped as if by a young locust who flies away. Princes and scribes are compared to locusts which may settle on a wall in the cold and when the sun gives warmth they fly away and where they go no one knows.

Suddenly, the merchants of Nineveh will be up and fly away. The scribes would also include military officials, just as in the army you have clerical officers.

The final verses refer to shepherds since the Assyrians regarded their people as sheep. They had to do as they were told but now the shepherds are asleep and uncaring in the times of great danger to their flock. There was no support from the nobles and rulers. Any survivors would be leaderless. It was the end of an empire.

This prophecy is full of detail which historical accounts has confirmed as true which is yet another evidence of the reliability of Scripture.

## HABAKKUK

Very little is known about this prophet but he is only one of three of the so-called minor prophets who described themselves as prophets, the others being Haggai and Zechariah.

This prophet asks two basic questions namely Was evil to remain unpunished? And how could a holy God use unholy instruments to achieve His will?

From references in chapter 3, it has been assumed that Habakkuk was in the Temple choir in Jerusalem and a Levite. His name means to embrace, one who takes his people into his arms to comfort and reassure.

However, the period in which he wrote is not clear to some commentators and his dates have been widely speculated. Some have even placed this book in the era of Alexander the Great of the fourth century BC since, in chapter 1 verse 9, it speaks of the faces of the aggressors directed to the east which could speak of Alexander's forces from the west looking east rather than Nebuchadnezzar who would be looking from the east to the west. It has further been suggested by some scribes that the word Chaldeans is an error and it should read Kittim, the land of the Greeks and Cypriots. As it does almost certainly refer to the Chaldeans, the book could be dated about 605 BC and Habakkuk would be a contemporary of Jeremiah.

Habakkuk was clearly a highly intelligent man and his writings are his talking to God; he was concerned about God's dealings with His people.

The first chapter, verses 2 to 4, expresses Habakkuk's complaint, Why is lawlessness unchecked? It is a question we can ask today. The prophet says, Why do I have to look at violence and trouble? Why is there so much iniquity? All that I see is violence and devastation; the law is of no effect and we are numb; the wicked surround the righteousness and justice is not done.

We, too, can be troubled that God should allow wickedness to continue. The reforms of good king Josiah had been forgotten and, as a result, sin reigned. The prophet here is deeply concerned that God has not answered him and what Habakkuk felt, so did much of the populace. The evil of the people of Judah had brought about Divine retribution and even the godly were suffering because of the evil of their fellows. So it is with us today.

One of the main problems was that the ruling class and other leaders in Judah were not interested in what was right. Even the priests turned a blind eye to temple prostitutes and earned more money from the subsequent sin and trespass offerings. Today, there is a denomination where penance is usually reciting some scriptures which allegedly cleanses them from their sin and so to sin again is easy.

As in the prophet's day, we who try to live godly lives are in a hostile scene. Even in Christian circumstances, we are opposed by other Christians for being both old-fashioned and irrelevant and also being so far behind the times that we are not getting people in. There is the wonderful story of a Pentecostal minister who visited Dr Scroggie in the last year of his life. This young minister bragged about his church being full and having lots of young people in every Sunday. The young pastor said, "The trouble with you and your generation, Dr Scroggie, is that you are so old-fashioned and you have taken preaching back many years. I have been in the ministry for eighteen months had many converts, lots of them. Dr Scroggie replied, "I have been in the ministry for 60 years and I have not had one convert... but the Lord has had a few!"

We live in a permissive society in which decency and morality has been rejected. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism and abortion are now regarded as blameless and those of us

who explain that these things are utterly wrong in God's eyes are again found to be in a hostile world and it is asserted that both the Bible and we are behind the times, utterly out of touch and irrelevant.

Verses 5 and 6 speaks of the prophet's shock at the surrounding warlike nations whom God is raising up to bring Divine judgement on His people. We read that these evil nations would make pyramids of severed heads along the way, boys and girls were to be sexually abused and burned alive, men were to be flogged and impaled, blinded or deprived of their limbs or ears and noses, attractive girls and women were to be captured for sexual pleasure and the city of Jerusalem would be plundered and destroyed. This is all set out in Professor Sayce's History of Assyria and the Nations.

Habakkuk describes the Chaldeans as a hasty and bitter nation and verses 7 and 8 calls them terrible and dreadful; their horses are swifter than leopards and fiercer than wolves and the horseman are very fast and eager to devour.

Verses 9 and 10 say that the Chaldeans are coming for the purpose of violence and they will take captives as sand. They ridicule the royalty and laugh at every Jewish fortress and stronghold realising how inadequate they are. They probably followed the custom of the day and put captive royalty in cages and verse 11 talks of their actions which imputed power to their god. The Chaldeans had no thought for the true God and that is the same for all who have false gods and are into idolatry and have no respect for the morality and teaching of the Bible and are and remain pagan and heathen. Such people are concerned with self and their wants.

The next two verses have Habakkuk's lament. How could the Lord God, who is pure, establish the grossly impure as punishment? Judah could be wiped out and be no more. God was Judah's Rock. Surely God would not break His covenant with His people.

God was and is infinitely pure and cannot tolerate iniquity or look upon sin and yet was allowing the Chaldeans to castigate His people.

Verses 14 to 17 has the prophet referring to God making the captives to be like caught fish or creeping insects. And the invaders rejoice over the conquest of Judah and burn incense to their gods. One of the industries of the captors was as fishermen and with the captives they continually used the hooks and nets as would a fisherman. How cruel many are to the people of God and, in our day, it is not only Jews who are persecuted but Christians are also persecuted by left wing politics, pagans and Communism.

Christians are now living in a hostile world. Their beliefs and morals are being laughed at and Christians are often referred to being scum, the enemy of science and against the modern way of thinking and living. Even in some Christian denominations there is a lessening of God's standards and the teaching of the Bible is relegated in favour of entertainment religion and emphasis on self.

Chapter 2 has the prophet waiting for God's reply and setting himself on a watchtower waiting to see what God will say and do and that would refer to the oncoming army. The Old Testament prophets were often compared to watchmen (Isaiah 21.8, Jeremiah 6.17 and Ezekiel 3. 17).

The Lord answered and told the prophet to write all of this down so that all may read it and it had to be made plain. Calvin believed that the clay tablets on which Habakkuk wrote would be displayed in the Temple.

The invasion was slow in coming and not necessarily imminent. When we consider the Second Coming it has been promised for two thousand years and despite many saying it could come at any time, others are saying, "O Lord, how much longer?"

Verse 4 contrasts pride with faith. This is God's estimate of character. The Chaldeans were puffed up with pride and arrogance but God resists the proud as set out in the epistle of James, and yet in our churches we have elements of pride. People stand up and talk about themselves and their previous sinful ways and the emphasis is on self whereas we are only to boast in the Lord Jesus and it is written in Galatians that what God has dealt with and forgiven must not be brought up again.

The righteous man will live by faith and the word for faith here is *emunah* which means to be firm and steadfast.

The next verse deals with the perils of strong drink and drunkenness. Kelly writes that the evil must be dealt with before blessing can come in power. Wine robs man of his senses and judgment. And to bring this up to date so does drugs. Such problems render people unable or unwilling to perform normal standards and decency. The Chaldeans were not only drunk with wine but with power. And still Habakkuk asks why does evil go unpunished even though God has promised judgment upon all evildoers.

There now follows five woes or laments. The first is against aggressors. In verses 6 to 8 we read, Woe to him who increases what is not his own and loads himself with pledges and property not his. This woe is addressed to the spoilation by the Chaldeans upon every country that they had conquered. They had loaded themselves with written clay tablets extracted from debtors contrary to Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 24.10). But the spoiler will eventually be spoiled and it will be their turn to stumble and tremble. Ultimately, the Chaldeans from Babylon would suffer for all her crimes. The whole area of Babylon would become a desolate waste with very little human habitation but occupied by wild animals of the desert, lions and jackals scavenging among the ruins of what were palaces. The cries of these animals would be heard.

The second woe occupies verse 9 to 11 and condemns self assertion. Woe to him who gains evil gains for his house to set his nest on high... and have devised shame to their house by cutting off many people... for the stone will cry out of the wall and the beams of timber will answer it.

From rapacious plundering to their assertion of dominance and to have authority over all nations. They had accumulated their ill-gotten gains for their own dynasty. The prophet likens the Chaldeans to an eagle who sets its nest on high as a means of security and protection from harm. To elevate themselves they set themselves on high in their pride and self-aggrandisement and there are people and nations like this today. Even in our churches there are pompous empire builders who elevate self and do not acknowledge that in all things Christ is to have the pre-eminence. In order to establish themselves they put the Lord down and dishonour Him. Like the Chaldeans they trample others underfoot but, ultimately, their end is destruction.

The third woe is against violence, verse 12 to 14. Some build a town with blood and establish a city with iniquity but in the last analysis the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. If we look at the inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar, they mainly relate to building activities and the magnificent buildings of Babylon. They used slave labour of their captives which is a feature of conquerors who build cruel empires.

We are exhorted in Scripture to do violence to no one (Luke 3. 14) and yet people like violence on television and the cinema. I hate violence of all sorts and remember that one of the names of the Lord Jesus is Prince of Peace.

But, eventually, the earth will be filled with the glory of God and all the hostile kingdoms of the world would be destroyed.

The fourth woe highlights many issues such as getting people drunk to view their nakedness and how the Lord will punish such voyeurism as well as the violence committed by the evil invaders.

The Chaldeans were noted for their drunkenness and giving drink to others so that they may be putty in their hands. This was done for many reasons including seeing the nakedness of others and indulging in sexual activity. To see the nakedness of anyone other than your spouse was forbidden and nakedness in the Bible does not only mean completely nude but inadequately dressed. In our day, we have women and even schoolgirls dressing provocatively with low tops and short skirts. We have nudity and sex on both the television and at the cinema and pornography is a successful money making enterprise. There is adultery and fornication on a very large scale and alcoholism is rising. Drunkenness can render people helpless and that shames both those who were drunk and those exposed to the shame put on them.

The conquerors had destroyed Lebanon and its forests which was the habitat of animals...but the conquerors would eventually be crushed like a crashing cedar of Lebanon. All who had suffered at the hands of the Chaldeans would be recompensed. The violence perpetrated by the evil nations would bring those nations into severe retribution at the hands of the Lord.

The final woe (verses 18-20) would be upon the Chaldeans idolatry. One can only conjecture as to why people worship dumb idols whether made of wood or metal. How completely stupid that is. How do such graven images respond? Idols were and are powerless but the true and only God was to be feared and respected. God was in His Holy Temple and about to act and the pagan idols, even those covered with gold, had no power or value.

Idol-worship is an abomination to God. It brought down evil Solomon and split the Jews into two kingdoms.

Chapter 3 is said to be Habakkuk's prayer and it is also said to have been sung. This ode might have been used in public worship. Verse 2 honours God and pleads for a revival and mercy must be remembered. The prophet calls the people to mind previous acts of mercy from the Lord and calls for a revival in the sense of the return to the old days of blessing. There are many who claim that spiritual renewal with its emphasis on charismata is such a revival sent by God and has produced much blessing but that cannot be so because it has produced schism and division and lessened the authority of scripture so that charismatic leaders such as Michael Harper state that doctrine is not important but only love is. The churches have become obsessed with their own ways rather than God's way and using worldly methods instead of spiritual aims. Revival can only come or be effective if we make Christ and His Will our only objective.

O Jesus Christ grow Thou in me  
And all thing else recede.  
My heart be daily nearer Thee  
From sin be daily freed.

May this poor self grow less and less  
Be Thou my life and aim ;  
O make me daily through Thy grace  
More meet to bear Thy Name.

We are not to preach ourselves but Christ and Him crucified (2 Corinthians 4. 5). We do not talk about ourselves or boast except in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6.14).

Verses 3 to 7 speaks about a reply in the form of a thunderstorm advancing from Edom and Sinai. To stress this, the word Selah is inserted which is an instruction to pause and consider. The brightness

and light of the Lord is revealed and the psalmist states that light is the garment of the Almighty (Psalm 104.2). Here the Lord is depicted riding on the storm as the victorious ruler triumphant having defeated his enemies. Before Him went pestilence and disease often regarded as instruments of judgment and the Lord said that such things would accompany the end-times (Matthew 24.7).

The storm was accompanied by an earthquake of tremendous power. The mountains shook as in Judges 5. 5 and there was also a storm of sorts at the Red Sea (Exodus 15.14ff). The nations close to the Red Sea were probably Cush and Midian which bore the brunt of this amazing event which was the deliverance of the children of Israel.

A Theophany was God talking to a human and Habakkuk, in verse 8, asks God, “Why are you angry with the streams and rivers?” and, presumably, other geographical features. The Lord rode through the storm clouds which He describes as His horses and chariots of victory.

The next section deals, verses 9 to 13, sees Divine judgment in operation. Weapons are ready, the earth has been cleaved, the mountains writhed, there were tempests and the waters of the deep roared. The sun and the moon were still as the arrows flew by. The Lord marched through the land in anger and trod down the evil nations and this was for the salvation of His people. All the enemies were crushed.

In His wrath, God furiously trashed the nations as the ox trampled out the grain on the threshing-floor so did the Lord Almighty trample the nations under His feet (Micah 4.13) and we can look beyond this to matters relating to the Second Coming. Then shall the Lord come and smite the nations with a rod of iron and dash them into pieces like a potter’s vessel (Psalm 2.9). He will be revealed as the King of Kings and Lord of lords and His Name shall be the Word of God.

The Lord used the Chaldeans to bring Judah to their senses but now He will pour out His wrath upon the oppressor. All that set themselves up against the Lord will perish. It may appear unfair for the Chaldeans to be punished when they were the instruments of God but they were always a pagan and evil nation steeped in idolatry which is heresy and would always invoke God’s wrath. The suffering of that evil race would be greater than the sufferings of Judah (Zechariah 14.2) and for the end-times the Lord said that if those days were not shortened no one would be saved (Matthew 24.21).

It is all very well people talking about the love and mercy of God but His severity must also be remembered. Because God is a God of love He must also be a God of justice and righteousness.

It may not be a comfort to us now but as verses 14 and 15 state the enemy will be destroyed. In our lives at this present time we are still surrounded by those who hate the God of the Bible but the day is coming when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. Every atheist, monarch, conqueror, politician, militant, terrorist, millionaire, scientist and people of fame will admit who the Lord is. Victory will be His and true believers will share in it because of their faith.

Habakkuk speaks in verse 18 about his strength being drained. He had heard the Word of the Lord in the storm and probably realised that after the invasion there would be salvation for Judah. He was weak and both physically and mentally exhausted and could hardly walk. In verses 17 to 19 he speaks of the future blossoming of the fig tree, that tree being a symbol of both Israel and Judah but this would be after the invaders had stripped the land bare. Everything will be lost and yet the prophet has faith in future restoration. He implies that it is not helpful to bemoan one’s fate although pessimism would be understandable. In times of trouble, God would be Habakkuk’s strength.

Trust Him when thy foes are many  
Trust when thy friends are few;

Trust Him when to simply trust Him  
Seems the hardest thing to do.

We must never forget the all-sufficiency of Christ in all circumstances of life.

## ZEPHANIAH

The name Zephaniah means God has hidden (as in treasures) or God protects.

His father was Cushi, an African, and the lengthy genealogy may have been recorded to overcome any opposition to his African father.

In turn, Cushi was the son of Gedaliah. Was this same Gedaliah who Nebuchadnezzar appointed governor of Judah after the Babylonian invasion and who saved Jeremiah's life?

The Gedaliah in this genealogy was the son of Amariah who was a son of King Hezekiah who reigned from about 715 - 686.

God spoke to Zephaniah in the days of good king Josiah whose reforms began in 622BC when the king was about 18. His father, Amnon, was assassinated and his father before him was Manasseh who reigned for 55 years and was evil and subservient to the Assyrians. Manasseh had pagan temples and the Jerusalem temple staged pagan rites, 'sacred prostitution', divination, magic and human sacrifices (2 Kings 21 1-16, 23 4-7).

As with other minor prophets, such as Habakkuk, there is judgment to be poured out on Judah and its capital of Jerusalem, and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, a call for repentance, oracles, or woes against five nations (there are five woes in Habakkuk) and God's promise of restoration of the Jews.

After an introduction to the prophet, we have in chapter 1 verses 2 to 4 details of the dreadful calamity to befall Judah. The whole land would be consumed, man and beast would perish and this disaster would kill fish and birds of the air. The Chemarim, that is to say the idolatrous priests named in 2 Kings 23. 5 and Hosea 10.5, who were stumbling blocks, would perish. It must be remembered that God hates idolatry and those who practise or allow it and this was being practised in the land which He gave to His people. Such evil, and other evils, were conducted even in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Kelly refers to two types of Jews at this time....those who, on the one hand, honoured God to some extent and then abandoned Him and those who never enquired of Him. The idolaters honoured their pagan gods even from the house tops publicly and shamelessly. This allegiance to false gods included the god Malcam, otherwise known as Moloch, the god of atrocious cruelty to which children were sacrificed in the fire. Baal was the god of fertility worshipped by the Canaanites and they were decadent and immoral hence many of the Temple prostitutes.

The day of the Lord in verse 7 is used to indicate any day of God's judgment and punishment. The reference to silence speaks of the shock, awe and wonder at what God will do. He speaks of the preparation of a sacrifice and invited guests. Usually, Judah is described as the victim and the guests are the invaders (1 Samuel 9.22) but here it seems as if the invaders are honoured whereas the Jews are the guests ready to be slaughtered. No one is exempt from God's judgment whether they are royalty or the eccentrics who dress in weird ways. There are those who intrude upon their respective master's houses with both deceit and violence and they will also be punished.

Violence is not God's choice. Judgment is God's strange work but it is always just (John 5.30). Remember Lamentations 3.33, The Lord does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

There will be weeping and wailing from Jerusalem's fish gate says verse 10. The merchants and traders will be cut down even those who trade in silver.

The day of the Lord is a day of wrath.

In verse 12, we have an example of complacency. God will search Jerusalem and find those who are complacent and who say, God will not do good or evil.

Does this exist in our churches today? One cannot generalise but many churches have introduced worldly methods. Others are complacent and I am fully aware of some churches who do not honour the Lord Jesus but believe that they have to entertain both God and their congregations with pop music, dancing by pretty young things, acted sketches, football matches for their men and some even have pub quizzes and people talking about themselves giving testimonies and often relishing in recounting their past life of crime and drugs. What God has forgiven must not be brought up again. We are called upon to evangelise not to entertain and to preach Christ and not ourselves. Worship is not a variety show.

Verse 13 tells us of those who build houses and create vineyards but that these things will become a booty to the invaders. There are many who are materialistic and value their possessions about all else. The following verse states that the great day of the Lord is near and this is due to God's anger at the evil committed, and still being committed by His people. There would be cosmic upheavals, death and destruction and emotional crisis and human loss of control with the terrors of the invasion and the greatest calamity. It would be a day, or time, of darkness and desolation and utter gloominess and depression. The trumpet of verse 16 is an alarm, a warning against Judah's fortresses as well as the people and the land itself. Mankind would stumble like blind men and cry bitterly and all this suffering is because they have sinned against the Lord and the vastness and despicably of their evil ways has gone on for a long time and the Lord had to act (verse 17). The land would be full of rotting corpses. The people would not be able to escape or buy their way out of the horrendous devastation that was to come.

Jealousy is often given a bad name but it is a means of protection for those who are loved. God will not tolerate a rival. After all, He has loved His people with an everlasting love, protected them and cared for them. His love for them was their greatest blessing and yet they threw it all away to pursue their own ways in violation of God's will and slapping God in the face with their betrayal and apostasy.

The coming judgment would not happen had the Jews been true to God. They continually grieved Him and mostly disowned Him and counted all His goodness and mercy of no value. The people were utterly corrupt. God calls them shameless.

I wish to briefly refer to the day of the Lord at the end times which centres on His Second Coming. It begins with the rapture of the church as set out in 1 Thessalonians 4.17ff, when the trumpet shall sound and all the dead in Christ will rise and those who are alive will be caught up as well to meet the Lord in the air. Then, following a period of seven years which is called the great tribulation, details of which begin in Revelation chapter 4 in which fantastic calamities will take place and about 75% of the world's population will perish. After which, the Lord will come to the earth as set out in Revelation 19 to fight against the nations of the world who have attacked His beloved people. We read in Zechariah 14 that all nations will gather against Jerusalem to battle and the city will be taken, houses rifled, the women raped and 50% of the Jews will be taken captive. This is when the Lord will go forth to fight the oppressors. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which will cleave in two. It will be a day that is not dark nor light. The victory of the Lord will set up His millennial reign in Jerusalem and during that thousand years Satan will be bound (Revelation 20.2). While Satan is bound there will be universal peace. Thereafter, he will be loosed (Revelation 20.7) and cast into the everlasting fire and, thereafter, the eternal state will be established as stated in Revelation 21.

Chapter 2 begins with God calling on Judah to repent of their shamelessness and evil ways and indicates that He does not desire them because of their iniquity. The implication is that God's righteous anger may dissipate since the verse states Seek ye the Lord as a parallel to seek

righteousness which means to know the character and will of God and to recall His mighty acts, love and mercy as well as his long suffering. The Jews should seek meekness, and that is not weakness as some assert. Such humility is a parallel to righteousness.

There follows five woes, five Divine condemnations against the Philistines (verse 5ff), Moab and Ammon (verses 8 to 11), Ethiopia (12), Assyria (verse 13ff) and Judah (chapter 3 verse 1 to 7).

The Philistines and their main cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron will be forsaken and become desolate and rooted up. All will be punished including the Cherethites who were people from Crete. Utter destruction will come upon them.

The word Palestine comes from the word Philistia and the Philistines are often described as Israel's most dangerous enemy but whatever this enemy will do, God promises to restore His people.

Moab is the nation thought to be the descendants of Lot and Ammon were also antagonists of Israel who made themselves great and were very proud and constantly ridiculed the people of God and, as a consequence, they would be like Sodom and Gomorrah but would eventually acknowledge God.

Ethiopia may be a reference to Egypt since Egypt had been Ethiopian. The Lord would slay this nation.

Assyria was the enemy of Israel. In 722 BC Assyria invaded Israel. Assyria and its capital Nineveh will be destroyed and be as a wilderness inhabited only by animals and birds. The country will be desolate and a byword to all who see it and its desolation.

All the enemies of God will perish. Kelly writes, The great charge of the Lord is to fully put down all idolatry. This is why God punished Solomon severely whose evil ways and idolatry caused the one kingdom of Jews to split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Chapter 3 begins with God's complaint about Judah and Jerusalem whose people are rebellious and the holy city is now portrayed as the capital of paganism. She had to be punished by extreme and adverse circumstances sent to chasten them. Her prophets made prophecies of comfort which were popular and the people were faithless, fickle, full of deceit and involved in idolatry. The priests committed sacrilege and violated the Divine will.

But in all this, there is the certainty that God is just. He cannot sin and His power does not fade. The Lord has cut off His people since the unjust Jews had no shame. The fall of other nations and empires was his doing although the fates of other nations made the Jews complacent. The Lord tells the Jews to wait for all this to happen and often the word wait refers to piety and sincerity as in Isaiah where it reads, Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Any Jews who remained true to the Lord, known as the remnant, had to remain steadfast in the time of God's anger.

Verse 7 reminds us that the Lord is to be feared. We are not talking here of being terrorised by God but respecting and honouring the Lord and, of course, He is worthy to be honoured. Although correction for the Jews was despised, it was necessary.

Verse 8 onwards instructs waiting on the Lord which we have already mentioned and all the oppressing nations will have God's wrath poured upon them and they will be converted which means to be taken away from prayer to pagan deities who have been no help to them. The reference to pure speech speaks of new dawning, a fresh start when people call upon the Lord and recognise the need for moral character and being enabled to serve the Lord. The scattering of people will be reversed from the regions known to the prophet and these, the Lord's dispersed people who will acknowledge His deity and worship Him.

Pride has been reduced to shame. The previous arrogance, self-assertion and paganism of God's people now will reveal itself in humility,repentance and consequent unspeakable joy (verse 14) not only for God's people but for the Lord Himself (verse 17). The acknowledgement of sin and its shame (chapter 2.1) results in God's exaltation (verse 20). Those who do no iniquity, nor speak unwisely or practise deceit will have no one to make them afraid.

After all the judgments and hardships, God will establish His people again which proves that He still loves them.

## HAGGAI

We have to understand the chronology and history of events. Haggai is a prophet who ministered after the fall of Judah to Babylon and who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonians were defeated by the Medo-Persians.

While dates may differ slightly the chronology appears to be

Fall of Jerusalem 586 BC, some say 587

Babylon falls to the Medo-Persians 539

Cyrus decrees the temple at Jerusalem be rebuilt 538

Allows some Jews to return 536

The work is started, hindered, stopped, restored.

Problems with laws and provocation from enemies and despondency.

Temple completed 516

We read that in the second year of the reign of Darius on the first day of the sixth month God spoke to Haggai and to Zerubbabel the son of Shaltiel, the governor of Judah and to Joshua the high priest. The message was to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.

Someone closely associated with Haggai was Ezra who led exiles from Babylon back to Judah (Ezra 8 2-14), presumably around 538, where he encouraged the reading of the Torah, the sacred writings, and cleansed the populace of mixed marriages.

A later notable was Nehemiah who was the cup bearer to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Nehemiah was made governor of Judah from about 444, and dealt with the rebuilding of the city walls around Jerusalem which took 52 days and then he returned to Susa in Persia.

Alec Motyer makes a helpful introduction to this book with this analysis:

1. Two messages on the same day and the ill consequences of leaving the house of the Lord unbuilt (1.1-11). Messages to Joshua and Zerubbabel (1. 1-2), to the people whose neglect of the House of God is the reason for their ills (1'.3-11)
2. The first 'I am with you' message (1.12-15)
3. The second 'I am with you' message (1.15- 2.9)
4. Two messages on the same day and the blessings of building a consecrated house (2. 10-23), a blessing to the people who built the house and a blessing to Zerubbabel.

The opening verse is very precise as to date. On the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of Darius, the Lord spoke to Haggai, Joshua and Zerubbabel and the Lord was concerned that the people did not think the time was right to rebuild the Temple. It may have been that they were concerned with their own housing arrangements. Perhaps they thought that their accommodation took priority.

Haggai responds and speaks about the people who are living in ceiled house when the Temple lies waste and the prophet calls on the people to consider their ways. The people were considering their own needs and ignoring the Temple, worship and, therefore, God Himself.

Before we are tempted to sit in judgment, is it not true that we put ourselves first at every opportunity and often the Lord and spiritual matters are ignored?

The prophet continues in verse 6 by saying that for all their hard work there is little harvest and not enough to drink; there is inadequate clothing with which to keep warm and the wages earned go so quickly, it is like putting your wages into a bag of holes. Clearly a drought is taking place which is affecting the crops and livestock. These difficulties are due to God's displeasure that His House lies waste. Some Jews concerned with the infertility of the land are turning to Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. That being so, it is no surprise that God is displeased. Many Jews believed in this fertility cult and, in their distress, turned to the cult of Baal.

The key to prosperity centred on loyalty to the Lord. It has been said that when the people shun the Lord then He withholds blessing.

Instructions in verse 8 are given to the location of wood for the building and then when the Temple is built God will be both delighted and glorified. All the peoples looking after other matters has not brought them success and it is down to the Temple still being in ruins.

The dew in the land was essential for the crops but this will be withheld and the produce of fruit will be halted. The people are running back and forth to their own houses and care not for the House of God who has called for the drought as an example to the people that they have their priorities wrong. This must not be taken as God being hateful or vindictive but as a reminder of the people's duty and loyalty to Him. If you consider the manifold blessings the Lord had bestowed upon His people then they should need no reminders of God's goodness to them.

The chapter ends with the people's response to Haggai's preaching. They believed the Lord had sent Haggai and that he was a true prophet and they began to regain their respect for the Lord, Haggai is now referred to as the Lord's messenger and assures the people that the Lord is with His people.

Both Joshua and Zerubbabel have their hearts stirred. They are inspired as are the people and they began the work in the House of the Lord in the 24th day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.

However, the work went slowly and was completed in the sixth year of Darius, four years after the work began (Ezra 6.15).

But the message from the Lord is, I am with you.

Chapter 2 begins with another date when the Lord spoke to Haggai telling him to speak to Joshua, Zerubbabel and the remnant of the people with the question, Who of you remember the Temple in all its glory? Look at it now. How do you compare it?

Then comes the second I am with you (2.4). Then the Lord makes reference to the exodus and how the Lord kept His word to His people and exhorted them to fear not.

The reference to the exodus was relevant since the date of the annual feast of tabernacles took part in the seventh month as did this announcement in the second chapter of Haggai.

The Sinai Covenant was a conditional one and set out the commandments that Israel had to keep and, if that was so, God promised that He would be with them. Part of the covenant was that God would be with His people and bless them.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that many atheists and agnostics including some famous figures had readily admitted that the ten commandments is the best code of moral conduct ever produced.

From verse 6, God says that in a little while God will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land and shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come. A little while seems a strange comment when this prophecy seems to refer to aspects of the Second Coming of Christ when there will be wonders in the heavens and the earth and all nations shall come to Jerusalem to be judged of the Lord Jesus at the start of His millennial reign. Then the Lord will fill this house, namely the Temple, with glory gives credence to the belief that a Temple will be built in Jerusalem in a day to come.

The expression a little while may be more understood when we read the a thousand years to us with the Lord is like one day.

All the wealth including gold and silver is the Lord's. He speaks about the Temple now being built as to be greater than the original built by Solomon and there is introduced the element of peace but this second temple was not always a place of peace. The Temple to be later built in Jerusalem will be occupied by the Prince of Peace during His thousand year reign.

There will be those who will disagree with this exposition but it does make sense and where the Lord reigns there will be peace.

I have heard this passage interpreted as the prosperity in the time of the second Temple and the riches that were pouring into Jerusalem which filled the Temple with glory. The glory of Solomon's Temple was well-known but the second Temple would have a glory all its own. I have also heard that Herod's Temple enjoyed glory for the Lord Jesus visited it.

Verses 10 to 14 present some problems. Haggai does not tell us what unclean offerings are being made but there is a distinction between the sacred and the profane and the clean and the unclean. What is profane and unclean is defilement.

There has to be cleansing before renewal. The 'holy flesh' was the part to be sacrificed to the Lord and was often carried in the robe of the priest. Did that make the robe itself holy and if the holy flesh touched other food did that make the other food holy as well? The priests answered no since such holiness cannot be transferred.

The second question Haggai asked of the priests was, if someone was made unclean by touching a dead body and touched any other things do these things become unclean? The answer would be yes and so the Israelites would be deemed to be unclean (Leviticus 11.28, 22. 4-7). Moral cleanliness cannot be transferred but moral uncleanness can.

This was part of Mosaic Law and was important for its time, whereas in our time it may not be relevant. The message is that the Jews were holy and set apart for the Lord (Exodus 19.6) but the nation was now defiled and everything it touched was unclean. The Lord had called Judah my people but now calls them this people. God was displeased with Judah for their disobedience by not putting the building of the Temple as a priority and, therefore, Judah was ceremonially unclean.

It is sadly true that there are Christians serving the Lord with unclean hands and hearts. It is not for us to give examples here but there are false doctrines being perpetrated and some are making money

out of their preaching and ministry. Having said that, we must all look to ourselves to ensure that we are serving the Lord for no earthly gain but solely to honour the Lord Jesus. Many are so concerned with speaking of their own experiences and what has happened to them and what they have done. We should again remind ourselves of that great hymn

O Jesus Christ grow Thou in me  
And all things else recede  
My heart be daily nearer Thee  
From sin be daily freed.

In chapter 2.14, Haggai recognises that Judah is unclean as is their work and offerings because of their procrastination and He exhorts the people to consider their ways even before the first stone of the temple is laid. The wheat crop which should have produced twenty measures at harvest only produced ten measures and the wine should have produced 50 vessels of wine but it only produced twenty. What is there in the barn? (v 19). The drought had affected the harvest.

The people had turned to the Lord but were still enduring the drought. The Lord had smitten the land with the blight of scorching wind and with mildew and with hail (v 17) at a time when the people had not turned to Him. This is the same message as in Amos 4.6, 8-11.

Life is full of changing points for Christians and we have to make decisions and if they are based on putting self first they are not in accordance with God's will and life may be full of problems until the believer considers their ways and returns to the Lord. Often what we do seems right and honourable but it may not be the Lord's will, however good our motive is. How often do we have to consider our ways and reflect on our Christian life? Sometimes we may take on a person with a problem thinking we can help and becoming embroiled in difficulties beyond our ability.

For the people of Judah, God now promises blessings. Obedience to the Lord always produces blessings. The heavens and the earth will be shaken. The nations that has been hostile to the Jews will be overthrown as the Lord announced to Zerubbabel (verses 21ff). The reference to the signet ring suggests kingship and whether Zerubbabel wanted to be a king we do not know but God blessed him.

What is obvious is that Haggai's preaching was effective and it was because it was based entirely on what the will of God was and the honour given to Him. Preaching and ministry today and, indeed, worship should concentrate exclusively on the Lord Jesus.

## **ZECHARIAH**

This book may be the most difficult of the Minor Prophets to understand and opinions vary on some interpretations.

The name Zechariah means remembered of Jehovah. It is thought that Zechariah's father, Berechiah died when his son was very young and so Zechariah is called the son of Iddo, who was his grandfather and a priest. Zechariah was born of a priestly family and was brought up in Babylon around the time of the termination of Judah's exile. He ministered to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem. He is not the Zechariah stoned to death after he prophesied in accordance with the Spirit's revelation to him. This Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chronicles 24.20).

The word of the Lord came to Zechariah in the second year of Darius, that is 520BC. The Lord was displeased and indeed angry with the previous generations of Judah and God calls His people to turn to Him and He will turn to them. He is keen to have His people back and He describes Himself as the Lord of Hosts which speaks of His mighty power and resources. Haggai ministered alongside Zechariah

Here in this prophecy, Divine reconciliation is offered. Sin makes fellowship with God impossible. Repentance is the first step to communion with God who is willingly and eager to forgive and welcome sinners and backsliders.

The opening chapters deals with eight night visions

1. The angel horsemen among the myrtle trees 2. The four horns and the four carpenters 3. The man with the measuring line (Chapter 2) 4. The cleansing of Joshua the High Priest (Chapter 3) 5. The golden lampstand (Chapter 4) 6. The flying scroll (Chapter 5) 7. The woman in the ephah (Chapter 5) 8. The four chariots and their horses and the crowning of Joshua (Chapter 6).

### **Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 verse 4 speaks of former prophets who had this message to instruct Judah to turn from their evil ways but they did not take heed. The next verse asks, Where are your fathers now? And prophets do not live for ever. All the punishment that God administered had no lasting effect. But God said that if the people returned to Him He would welcome them back. Verse 6 informs us that God's words and statues, which He commanded His servants, the prophets, did not have a lasting hold on the people. The Lord therefore dealt with the people because of their sins, lack of repentance and their ignoring Him and Judah accepted the reasons for Divine judgment.

Three months after this first message of Zechariah, and two months after the messages of Haggai and while the Temple was being rebuilt, came Zechariah's next message in the month Sebat. This period indicates from the new moon of January to the new moon of February and this message was a vision. It was night time and a man was riding a red horse among the myrtle trees that were in blossom and behind him were three other horses coloured red, speckled and white. The first rider was the angel of the Lord (v 11). Red speaks of judgment and warfare and here it is directed against the enemies of God's people. It is said that speckled means reddish brown or chestnut in colour, whereas white is a symbol of victory. The prophet asks for the meaning of this and is promised an answer from the angel of the Lord since He would interpret the eight night visions that Zechariah would have, this being the first.

The rider of the first horse is accompanied by holy angels who say that they have walked throughout the earth which is currently at rest, relaxed and tranquil. He who is on the red horse asks, How long He will have mercy on Jerusalem upon which He had indignation during the 70 years of their captivity

in Babylon from 586BC to 516. The Lord spoke a message to the prophet to proclaim that He is jealous for Jerusalem and with a great jealousy. As we have said elsewhere, jealousy is given a bad press but when you love someone you will not entertain any rival. There must be faithfulness and loyalty. Judah in her sinful state had followed many of the examples of the heathen which nations God was sore displeased with. For the Christian, we must remember that we are in this world but not to be of it. We are to follow the Lord Jesus and not the secular and worldly ways all around us. The Lord says in verse 16 that, in His mercy, He is to return both to Jerusalem and to His House, the Temple, which will be built and a builders line shall be stretched forth upon the city. The city would be clearly defined by boundaries. The Lord said that His cities shall be enlarged and improved. Prosperity was to return throughout the land in the mercy and provision of God. From verse 18, we have the second visions of four horns. The horn in the Scripture is a symbol of power. There are several suggestions as to what powers they might be. It could be the four great empires which were enemies of the Jews namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persia or successive Gentile powers. When the prophet asked, What are these? The reply was that they were four great Gentile nations that had scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. In Revelation, we read of the same four world powers and, in this book and also in the book of Daniel, we read of ten horns which are ten kings or rulers. The word scattered is the use of the word winnow, the process of separating the corn from the chaff. From verse 20, we have a vision of four carpenters which I take to be part of the second vision. In those days, Carpenters not only worked with wood but with metal and stone. The Revised Version uses the word smiths and Darby uses the word craftsmen. The Lord Jesus was a craftsman and His work would have been excellent. In His humanity, He was a working man and, as with the book of Hosea, God is desirous of mending broken things. The nations that were enemies of Judah would be frayed (v 21) thrown into terror and have cause to tremble and to go into a panic. These Gentile nations had lifted up their heads in pride like an animal about to charge, but all enemies of the Jews would be punished and by God Himself.

## **Chapter 2**

Chapter two begins with the night vision of a man with a measuring rod in his hand, and, at the enquiry of Zechariah, the prophet was told that this man was to measure Jerusalem to determine its size for its rebuilding and expansion. The angel that spoke to Zechariah went forth and another angel went out to meet the interpreting angel. The second angel tells Zechariah, now referred to as the young man, to run and declare the glad tidings that Jerusalem will be inhabited again as will other towns both with many people and livestock and will have strong walls which speaks of security. It will be a time of prosperity. Verse 5 speaks of a wall of fire around the city. At night, campfires were a protection against predatory animals. In the end times of the future, the Lord Himself will protect Jerusalem but now the Lord will be the glory in the midst of the city as well as the protection around the city. In Revelation, we read of the New Jerusalem descending from the heavens and the glory of the Lord lightens it. The Lord shall be its everlasting light (Isaiah 60.19) and the sun and the moon shall not give light.

From verse 6, the Lord urges the rest of His people to flee away from Babylon which is described as the land of the north, the area from which both the Assyrians also came and Jeremiah 4.6, and 25.9 confirms this. The Lord had dispersed His people like the four winds and Matthew 24.31 says, The angels shall gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heaven to the other. Verse 7 calls upon the Jewish people to deliver themselves from the daughters (people) of Babylon for various reasons including the fact that judgment God is to bring upon this nation. Revelation 18. 4 states, And I heard another voice from heaven saying ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.’ We can apply this to Christians today. While we should not be judgmental of others, we must not be involved with matters that are not suitable for Christians remembering Philippians 4.8. However, we must not set ourselves up as judges and juries but rather have hope that our witness to the Christian faith may help others to find faith in the Lord Jesus

But those who hurt the Lord's people touches the apple of God's eye. The eye is a vital organ in the body and needs care and attention. To touch the eye is symbolic of harming it. The beginning of this verse says, 'After the glory He sent me to the nations which spoiled you.' This is not particularly clear but what is obvious is that the Lord and His glory will be in the midst of Jerusalem and in the nations who desired glory for themselves. In verse 9, the Lord says that He will shake His hand upon the nations and they shall be a spoil to their servants and they shall know that the Lord of hosts sent Zechariah. The shaking of the hand was a sign both of anger and sore displeasure and the nations would be a spoil refers to the plunder of goods. Verses 10 to 13 speaks of the singing of rejoicing since the Lord was to dwell with His people in Jerusalem.

The expression O daughter of Zion is viewed as a beautiful young woman says Unger. The fact that the Temple would be completed some four years later meant that the worship of God would be resumed in Zion and when, in the future, the new Temple in Jerusalem will be where the Lord shall have the glory and shall sit and rule upon His throne (Zechariah 6.13). And, later still, in the New Jerusalem there will be no Temple for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it (Revelation 21.22). In the time of the millennium, many nations shall be joined to the Lord and receive a Divine welcome and all people will know that Almighty God has sent the Lord Jesus to dwell in the midst of the people. The blessed Lord shall be in Judah and choose Jerusalem for His dwelling and here is the only mention in Scripture of the holy land. All mankind will, one day, be silent before the Lord seeing Him in all His majesty, glory and power. John, on the island of Patmos, was so overwhelmed by the Lord's glory that he fell at His feet as if dead. In a day to come, the Lord will act to vindicate His people such is His love for them.

### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 deals with the cleansing of Joshua the High Priest who has Satan standing beside him to resist him. The High Priest also has the angel of the Lord with him. Satan is the adversary who was once an anointed cherub but whose heart was lifted with pride against God. When he sinned, he took a third of the angels with him. These are demon spirits for which there is no redemption. Satan constantly opposes God and His will. Here he is trying to nullify Joshua's service which is representing the people. There is always opposition to the work of the Lord and attempts to discredit His servants. The Lord rebukes Satan. The Lord has chosen to bless Jerusalem. Judah is the brand plucked out of the fire. Joshua clothed in filthy garments was unfit to perform his sacred ministry. But the defilement upon Joshua was a picture of the sins and defilement of all the people but, nonetheless, this is a very telling symbol of the pardon and forgiveness of sin due to the mercy of God. The change of raiment is significant. The filthy garments representing sin were to go, which would be a relief to Joshua himself, who would now be clothed in clean festal garments. This is a fine picture of the cleansing from sin and the creation of a new life. The fair mitre was a turban-like head covering. Fastened to the front of this was a gold plate engraved Holiness unto the Lord. The angel of the Lord stands by to ensure that all is done well and properly. When we read that the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua we must realise that the word protested means solemnly affirmed and was the confirmation that Joshua was to be the representative of the people.

Today, the world is full of people who claim to represent the people unto the Lord and assert that they are doing God's work with His approval but some are merely making names for themselves. Some such self-appointed leaders are astray from the Bible and pursuing false teachings and some are even making denominations of their own. Congregations are choosing people who they like to take offices in their places of worship, some of these offices are modern concepts and not scriptural, such as worship leader. Verse 7 sets out God's requirements for His people. They are to walk in His ways and the word walk means to live. We are to live according to His ways and keep His charge, commission and ordinances.

The High Priest had to administer justice in God's House and also to keep the courts clean. As a result, there were places to walk with God in blessed fellowship. While Joshua had the highest position, that is to say the official position of representing the people, it would be shared by ministering angels. Taken literally, this cannot refer to Joshua but to the Millennial Reign of Christ with His angels. Here the Lord is referred to as the Branch, the Messiah. He is referred to as the Branch in Isaiah 11.13 and Jeremiah 23.5ff. In Jeremiah, He is the righteous Branch and the Lord our righteousness. What is the stone laid before Joshua ? Some see it as a symbol of the covenant people themselves but this is untenable as is the suggestion that it is the foundation stone of the Temple

Dr F A Tatford says it is most likely to be the headstone (Zachariah 4. 7 and 9) which would be the final stone to complete the Temple. The stone is used to describe the Messiah as the chief corner stone (Matthew 21.42). Upon the stone are seven eyes. Seven in Scripture is the number of both completion and perfection and the eyes indicate the ever watchfulness of the Lord. In a day to come. Iniquity will be removed in one day which reminds us of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the Jew's national day of cleansing. When the Lord returns in glory, there will be peace and neighbourliness. He will reign (Isaiah 9.6) and therefore there will be peace and prosperity (Micah 4.4.).

## **Chapter 4**

And so to Chapter 4. The angel of the Lord, the interpreting angel, awakens the prophet and asks Zechariah what he sees. The prophet replies a golden candlestick with a bowl at the top with seven lamps on it with seven pipes to the lamps. This is a golden lampstand as used in the tabernacle (Exodus 25. 31-40). The item that Zechariah saw had an olive tree on each side of the lampstand which discharged oil into the bowl on top of the lampstand. Zechariah asks what this means and the angel seems surprised at the question. The reply is for Zerubbabel with a well known verse, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah and here reference is to a Divine agency not a human one but a spiritual energy from the Lord. This recalls Haggai 2. 4ff, 'Yet be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, for I am with you and My spirit remaineth with you, fear ye not.'

Verse 7 speaks of a great mountain that shall become a plain and the Lord shall bring forth the headstone with rejoicing and the words, 'Grace be unto it.' The mountain symbolises every resisting power, anything that is in opposition to God but this hindrance will become a plain, a level even place. Paul speaks of a strong faith that could remove mountains and mountains denote opposition. Zerubbabel has laid the foundation of the Temple and he will see that the final headstone will also be laid and the people will know that this is the Lord's doing.

Verse 10 is a comfort. We must not despise the day of small things, or the small things themselves, but rejoice and be encouraged by them. A day of small things might suggest insignificant things but this day in mind was the laying of the foundation of the Temple. The plummet, the measuring line had been used and the seven eyes speaks of the complete overseeing of the Lord and we are reminded that He sees everything that takes place on the earth. He sees all the nations and each individual and knows what is the heart of everyone. He knows all our thoughts and motives and He resisteth the proud. The prophet asks for the meaning of the two olive trees each side of the golden lampstand and, again, the angel seems surprised at the question (verse 13). The reply is that they are anointed ones, the two sons of oil, ready to serve the Lord. They are there for God's purpose. There are some who feel this symbolism needing interpretation would benefit from plainer speech. But it takes little thought to discover its message.

## **Chapter 5**

The fifth chapter deals with the sixth and seventh visions. The first is of a flying roll or scroll moving through the air. It measured twenty cubits in length and the breadth was ten cubits which is 30 foot

by 15 foot. Its dimension were exactly the same length and breadth of the holy place in the tabernacle (Exodus 26.15). The flying roll represented a curse (verse 3) over all the earth and everyone that steals or swears shall be cut off. This would primarily refer to the eighth commandment since stealing is a sin against a fellow man and swearing is against the third commandment which is a sin against God. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in Vain. (Exodus 20 7).

We live in days where some churches do not seem to respect God's name. The Lord Jesus is sometimes referred to as Jesus as if He were the man next door. I have heard Him referred to as a good bloke and a modern Sunday School in Manchester has a song My God is a big guy. The ghastly musical Godspell refers to the Lord as just a man. A pretty charismatic girl refers to the Lord as her mate. Those who take the name of the Lord in vain shall be cut off. This may refer to punishment or cleansing. The two sides of the scroll deal with stealing and the other deals with swearing. If anyone swears falsely, the curse will enter the house of the guilty party and the timber and stones will be infected with some plague or fungus that could destroy the property. Such a condition had to be referred to the priest for remedial treatment (Leviticus 14. 36-45). If this was unsuccessful then the damaged stones and timber would have to be taken outside to an unclean place and if this failed the whole house would have to be broken down.

The seventh vision was of an ephah going forth. An ephah was a large measure used by the Jews for dry substances such as flour and barley. It was a wooden receptacle large enough to accommodate a woman (verse 7). The interpreting angel refers to its resemblance through all the earth and refers to the lawlessness in trade and commerce and/or the intent of the woman to corrupt commerce. Thorough the earth probably means throughout the land as in the previous incident. A talent of lead was the heaviest measure of weight used by the Jews estimated to be about 125 pounds. The talent was lifted up so the prophet could see into the ephah. It would appear that the woman representing lawlessness attempts to emerge from the ephah. The lead was cast into the ephah and hit the mouth of the woman. This probably refers to the illegal trade practices that the Jews saw in Babylon and, in Revelation, Babylon the great harlot is referred to as a woman. As Christians, we are called to be honest in business. This account now speaks of two women with huge wings like those of a stork, an unclean bird (Leviticus 11.19), who seized the ephah and its evil occupant and flew away with it. It was carried away by the wind and wind is often referred to as judgment (Job 27.20 etc.). The two women have been interpreted in two ways. Firstly as agents of God's judgment and, secondly, as evil agents to take the ephah away from impending judgment. They were to carry the ephah to Shinar in Babylon the country of an enemy. Shinar was known for its open rebellion against God and has also been taken as a symbol of Satan's wickedness. Rebellion against God will not be tolerated by the Lord.

## **Chapter 6**

Chapter 6 has the most unusual vision, vision number 8. Four chariots appear from between two mountains of brass. Four is the symbol of universality. The colours of the horses drawing the chariots are red, black, white and grizzled grey. Red speaks of warfare, black symbolises famine, white both triumph and victory and grizzled grey active and strong. The prophet again asks what does this mean and the interpreting angel describes the chariots as the four spirits of the heavens which proceed from the presence of the Lord and go for the throughout the earth or throughout the land. These must be angelic beings on a mission for the Lord. The black horse goes into the north country followed by the white horse. This refers to Babylon, north east of Jerusalem. The grizzled horse goes towards the south country which is Egypt. The horses are to fulfil the purposes of God and the angels travelled to and fro throughout the area carefully scrutinising what was going on and to determine the judgment that was to follow.

Verse 8 indicates that the angelic judgment had caused the wrath of God to diminish. Three men of the captivity of Babylon are named. They are Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah who are to be received and taken to Josiah, the son of Zephaniah, where hospitality would be given. These three men had brought with them silver and gold which was to be used to make crowns to be set up the head of Joshua the High Priest. Some say that the word should be crown (singular) and the pluralisation indicates excellence. A Levitical priest was never crowned as such, but a crown is used to indicate part of the priest's clothing. The head piece was a turban like item with a holy crown thereon (Exodus 28. 1). The crown was the plate of pure gold engraved with the words Holiness unto the Lord. Verse 12 refers to the Lord Jesus as the Branch who will build the Temple of the Lord. In 9.9 we read, ' Behold the King cometh unto thee.' Pilate uttered such words, as in chapter 6. 7, ' Behold the man.' The Lord will build the Temple in the sense that the Lord Himself will be the Temple (Revelations 21.22).

In Zechariah's time, Zerubbabel would lay the foundation of the Temple and his hands would also finish it (Zechariah 4.9). He would be the High Priest and take the throne in the Temple and there would be peace. In the Millennium Reign of Christ, there will be peace since the Lord will reign from Jerusalem. The Lord shall bear the glory. Psalm 8. 1 talks of His glory which has been set above the heavens. The Kingship of the Messiah will, in days to come, be active and autocratic and, as a priest, He will represent His people. An autocratic rule is usually associated with fear and the suppression of the people but not so with the Lord Jesus. Psalm 2 says that the kings of the earth will serve the Lord with fear, a reverential fear. In much Christian worship today, there is no reverence and respect. There is a lack of attention to the study of the Bible, an over emphasis on 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 in which the dreadful conduct of the church at Corinth is overlooked. The main features of modern worship are self and entertainment as well as worldly methods such as dance and a type of pop music to lyrics that are often misleading and wrong, It is Look at Me rather than Look at Christ. Heldai mentioned earlier is now called Helem (verse 14) and the crowns, or crown, shall be in the Temple as a memorial or reminder to these three men and to Josiah's hospitality. I believe that what we do for the Lord is not forgotten and, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we shall receive awards for our faithful stewardship. This hearing will not be concerned with our sin for that has been dealt with at the Cross but we shall give an account of ourselves. Verse 15 talks of those who are afar off who will come back to the holy land. Most of these will travel the long distance from Babylon and they will be interested in both the rebuilding of the Temple and the revival of spiritual things.

Oh that today people, even Christians, would be interested in the Word of God and its study since it is this enhances fellowship with God and nearness to Christ. Some commentators introduce the idea that those who afar off foretell of Gentiles who will come into the benefit of being saved and quote Acts 2.39 For the promise is to you and to your children and to them that are afar off, and Ephesians 2. 13 But now ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. The people of Judah would know that God sent Zechariah. The people were to obey the voice of the Lord God and that would show in their participation of the revival in the land.

## **Chapter 7**

Chapter 7 is important since it is relevant to us today. It begins with the matter of fasting and leads to matters of hypocrisy. A deputation from Bethel had come to Jerusalem to ask of the priest and prophets in the Temple which was in the course of being rebuilt. The question was should they continue to fast and mourn in the fifth month. And the answer came via the Lord through the prophet Zechariah that the fasting of this month and every other month must be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts (8.9). This event took place about two years after Zechariah had received the eight night visions and therefore half way through the rebuilding of the Temple. The deputation consisted of two men, Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their companions. To pray before the Lord meant to intreat the favour of the Lord. It would appear that these people from Bethel had been commemorating the leading incidents in the Babylon catastrophe. The Lord also mentions the seventh month. Abstaining from food and drink was regarded as an act of sanctification as inferred from verse 6 but it was also

to indicate consecration. The question is asked by the Lord, Did you fast for yourselves or for Me in those seventy years of captivity? The Lord found their fasting to be hollow and merely a ritual, therefore hypocritical.

As we have said, there is so much hollowness in churches today, particularly the modern ones, in which self is promoted and the Lord is not given the place He deserves. Colossians states that in all things He is to have the pre-eminence, not the music group, the individuals talking about themselves (2 Corinthians 4. 5), the praise team, whatever that is, the dancers, the important guests, or self expression. God is not worshipped with men's hands (Acts 17.25) and worship in the Scripture is more the bending of the knee and reverence and certainly not noisy exuberance. Worship is for God alone and not to be a recital of what mere men and women have done and their standing up and talking about their sinful lives and all the wrong they did before they met the Lord. What God has forgiven should be remembered no more and must not come up again. If anyone be in Christ they are a new creation; all old things are passed away... that is to say dead and buried and not to be exhumed (2 Corinthians 5.17, Galatians 6.15) We do not go to church to do things our way but to be obedient to the Lord and revere Him. Fasting was in the Law of Moses for one occasion only, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16. 29ff).

It was known as fasting day (Jeremiah 36.6) and also known as the fast (Acts 27.9).

In times of war, there were voluntary groups fasting (Judges 20.26, 1 Samuel 7.6). In times of great grief, there was fasting with the tearing of robes, sackcloth and ashes and in the time of Esther, when faced with the destructions at the hands of Haman, there was fasting (Esther 4. 3 etc.).

Former teaching is recommended in verse 7. It should never be forgotten or ignored. Here is a plea for the traditional ways, not modern or trendy ways but the old paths and to remember the unchangeability of God and His will. Listen to the words of the prophets of old, says verse 7 since what they uttered was from the Lord. Today people want to move with the times and reject the old ways established by the Lord. There is no authority in the Bible for modern worship. God is immutable. He does not change nor does the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 13.8) and in the next verse we are told not to be carried about with differing and strange doctrines. Psalm 102.27 talks about God being the same and unchangeable. Malachi 3.6 could not be plainer. I am the Lord, I change not. James 1.17 states that there is no variableness with God. In Isaiah 43. 18, the man of God complains that people do not remember the former things or consider the established ways of old. Jeremiah 6.16 recommends the old and established ways and, as we have said, God does not change.

We must come to God on His terms, not ours. At conversion, God forgives our sins and they are to be remembered no more (Hebrews 10.17) and certainly not to be made public as in a testimony. Sadly, people will dismiss this teaching but it is Scriptural. Before Jerusalem was laid desolate, it was prosperous and was defined by three areas namely the southern district, that is to say the Negeb as far as Beersheba. Then there was the lowland, the plain to the west on the Mediterranean coast and, finally, the hill country of Jerusalem and the cities nearby. The next message to Zechariah was to execute judgment and show mercy and compassion to everyone. Judgments had to be without bias or partiality. We are not to think evil, even in our heart, towards a brother but to care for the widows, the orphans, the poor and strangers. Note we are to care for them.

One of the most intrusive and despicable things that happens in some churches is when a stranger or visitor comes along for the first time and they are jumped on by an existing member who may invite them to a meal and pump them with questions to find out all about them. And they dare to call this fellowship. It is not; it is nosiness. 1 John 1 tells us clearly that fellowship is sharing the things of God and of Christ. As in Zechariah's time, people refuse to listen and some people of Judah are stubborn pulling away with the shoulder as an act of defiance and stopping their ears as they are adamant with a heart of stone not wanting to hear or obey the law of God and what He said to the

former prophets and this incurs God's wrath. Graham Scroggie was right when he said, "There are no better Christians but there are more obedient ones." As verse 13 states there are people who will not hear or heed the word of God. The seventy years captivity in Babylon was a punishment for the sins of Judah and still the attitude of some was disobedience to the Lord.

## **Chapter 8**

Chapter 8 is a continuation of the previous chapter and begins with the Lord admitting His jealousy for Zion that is to say Jerusalem. As we have said jealousy is given a bad press but it is understandable and commendable since if you love someone you will not tolerate any rival. Here the Lord displays His deep passion for His people and He is furious at Babylon for their mistreatment of the people of Judah. The Lord was returned to Zion and will spiritually dwell in Jerusalem which shall be called a city of truth and Zion would be holy and even the old people with their staffs will be content in the city streets. The streets will be full of boys and girls playing. There will be no threats or danger, certainty not uncertainty, safety and peace are not the ravages of war. It will be marvellous in the eyes of the people and also in the eyes of the Lord. Wherever His people are scattered they will be regathered ultimately and universally. They shall all dwell in the safety of Jerusalem and truth will prevail. God will be acknowledged by all people and be their God and God will own them as His people. In days to come of the millennial reign of Christ and of the eternal state this will be so. But this has always been God's will.

In the current days before us in the book of Zecharia, the Lord tells His people to be strong and these are the days of the rebuilding of the Temple and attention must be paid to the voices of the prophets namely Haggai and Zechariah even though the harvests were poor and there was little money in this hard times. Consequently there had been conflicts with everyone against his neighbour (verse 11) but the remnant would now be occupied with the building of the Temple and prosperity would follow and the harvests would be successful. Days of economic depression would give way to Edenic days. The people had sown little (Haggai 1.9) but now the vine would give its fruit, the ground give her increase and the heavens give its dew (Haggai 1.10 and 11). Both Israel and Judah had become a symbol of curses among the heathen nations who had observed how God had punished them but in a day to come the manifold blessings of God would become evident. In the meantime the people had to be strong and dedicated to the building of God's House. God would help them and save them and they would become a blessing. The word bless or blessing is not always understood or appreciated. It means conducive to happiness or welfare, or to praise, congratulate or salute.

Verse 14 speaks of God punishing His people and His not repenting of this, that is to say not changing His mind. He did not change His mind because they did not repent and change their ways. Now things are different and as Wycliffe said, God now delights to bless. God adds, Fear not.. The Almighty then tells the people what they must do, namely speak the truth to everyone execute peace and judgment within your city not to imagine evil against any neighbour, make no false oaths or promises since these are things that God hates. The nineteenth verse again calls for all fasting to be joyful and cheerful occasions and note that God now calls them feasts. Verses 20 and 21 seem to indicate Gentiles visiting Jerusalem or perhaps other Jewish cities in response to their hearing of the prosperity of Jerusalem and wanting to speedily visit. This will also be in days to come in the Millennial reign of Christ. Verse 22 makes note of many nations. Ten men will take hold of the skirt of a Jew suggests urgency and to see the joy of the Jews in their days of both restoration and blessing and these ten men are examples of other nations with their own languages. As Dr Tatford said, There are great days coming for the Israelis.

## **Chapter 9**

Chapter 9 presents problems. It seems isolated from all that has gone before and the language and style is different causing some to think that there is a second Zechariah just as some think that there

are two Isaiah's in that prophetic book. The first eight chapters of Zechariah was written during the rule of the Medo-Persian Empire and chapters 9 to 14 speaks of Israel and her enemies and not of Judah and her release from exile. It has been said that chapters 9 and 10 speak of the oppression of Israel during the oppression by the Greeks and chapter 11 speaks of Israel under the Roman Empire when Israel would reject the Messiah and chapters 12 to 14 are entirely future concerning the military forces in the time of the Antichrist and the return of the Lord Jesus to set up His millennial reign in Jerusalem. Chapter 9 deals with the judgment of Israel's enemies and I may not need to deal with this in detail as the principles have already been dealt with earlier. In verse 1 and 2 it is the Syrians where Hadrach, Hamath and Damascus will be judged. Verses 2 to 4 there is judgment on the Phoenicians where Tyre and Sidon will be judged and verses 5 to 7 has judgment upon the Philistines naming the cities Ashkelon which shall see fear, Gaza will become very sorrowful, Ekron will be shamed and Ashdod will be inhabited by strangers. Jehovah will cut off the pride of the Philistines (verse 6) and Jerusalem will be preserved.

Verse 9 refers to the Lord Jesus's future entering Jerusalem in what we call Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. From verse 10 we read of Ephraim, denoting the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jerusalem denoting the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and the battle will be cut off for the Lord shall speak peace from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. The Lord will release His people who are imprisoned and will extract vengeance twofold from those who have oppressed His people. The enemies of the Lord and His people will not prosper but will be defeated.

The reference to Greece in verse 13 has been said to refer to the time of Alexander the Great (356BC-323 BC) at the time of the Maccabees in the second century. Israel did not war against Alexander but remained safe when he visited Jerusalem. Later, Israel was victorious over Antiochus Epiphanes I, Alexander's successor. There was a bitter conflict with the Syrian Greeks and the Maccabees gained a convincing victory. The following verse speaks of the Lord's judgment going forth as lightning, swift, unstoppable and irresistible. The Lord shall defend the Maccabees and history has proved this. The Maccabees were a Jewish army that took control of Judah and reasserted the Jewish religion. They fought against the Seleucid Empire of Syria after the death of Alexander the Great and they also fought against the Hellenistic empire of Greece. The Lord shall defend His people and the enemies will be devoured and subdued and they shall be filled like the bowls of the altar which were filled with the blood of the sacrificed animals. The suggestion is of the blood of their conquered enemies. The noise of battle gives way to a scene of tranquillity as the Lord will lead His flock who will dwell in safety and security. The stones in the slings of the enemy achieved nothing but the nation of Israel will be like precious stones to the Lord (verse 16) and His people will appreciate the greatness of God and the attractiveness of His goodness and generosity and the people will be cheerful (See Isaiah 62 verse 1 to 3).

## **Chapter 10**

If chapter 9 deals with the enemies of Israel, then chapter 10 deals with the glory of Israel's Messiah. The opening verse deals with prayer and God promises showers of rain to produce a good harvest. The latter rain was in April and May. There follows a condemnation of idols. It was usually idolatry that caused to God punish His people and send them into captivity. The idols referred to here were busts or full length figures some even life size who were said to be able to speak through mediums. Throughout Scripture all forms of witchcraft, sorcery and mediumship is condemned.

Idolatry includes necromancy the alleged communication with the dead sometimes through a medium, or psychic, hence spiritualism (Deuteronomy 18. 11), divination to foresee being inspired by some god or other; it could also refer to superstition (Deuteronomy 18.14), magic which are tricks, delusions, illusions and astrology (Exodus 7.11 etc.) soothsayers which includes fortune telling, Tarot cards (Acts 16.16ff etc.) sorcery anything that is paranormal and the control of the supernatural (Deuteronomy 18.10) witchcraft includes spells and potions, nudity among adherents as the spirits

can get through to people if they are nude, dancing naked around fires, consider Moloch in the Old Testament, (Leviticus 18.21 etc.), sexual freedom where no sex is condemned and even paedophilia is allowed. Some black witchcraft is decidedly evil, lying wonders. Satan is the greatest liar and deceiver and Satanic powers and Satanism is evil and anti-God (2 Thessalonians 2.9) Idols in verse 2 are usually referred to as Teraphim which is interpreted as domestic gods and family idols and they speak falsehoods and other lies and vanities and the nation of Israel followed the ways of the idols not knowing where they went being like lost sheep without a shepherd. The shepherds specifically referred to here as those who should have discouraged the use of idols or those of other nations encouraging idolatry. They will be visited in punishment but the goodly horse speaks of Israel battling against the idolaters. From Jehovah or Judah, or both, will come the corner stone that which unites two walls, the nail, really a tent peg, the means of fixing securely. The Messiah will equip Judah completely to destroy the oppressor.

And so verses 3 to 12 talk about the supremacy of God. It laid low the Assyrian army (Isaiah 37.36) and it was God who terminated the power of Babylon. Other empires have come and gone as have all the enemies of God and His people. Verse 5 talks of the mighty men of Judah who will trample underfoot their enemies and they will be victorious because the Lord is with them and the cavalry of the enemy will be confounded. The following verse speaks of God strengthening Judah and showing mercy so that they are not cast off and God will listen to them. And the chapter begins with prayer. The reference to the house of Joseph is interesting. Ephraim was the youngest of the sons of Joseph and Ephraim is often put forward as representative of the ten tribes of Israel. Isaiah 7.17 mentions the time when Ephraim departed from Judah but the day will come when Israel and Judah will be united as one. Ephraim will be mighty again and they and their descendants shall see this and rejoice (verse 7).

The Lord says, I will hiss for them. The word hiss means a signal, to make a sign or to communicate. The Eastern shepherd make signs to his sheep by a signal or a whistle perhaps with a bamboo pipe. In a day to come the Lord will issue a signal for all His flock, all of Israel to be united and come together. He will bless them and they will increase and be prosperous. They were to be scattered no more but even when they are in far countries they will remember the Lord and be in contented families (verse 9). God will draw them from all lands and they will increase and there may not be enough land for them but that will be a temporary situation. Verse 11 may be difficult but it may mean that anyone or any nation that resists the return of God's people will suffer affliction and even the might of Assyria and Egypt shall not thwart God and His plans for His people. Herein is explained the supremacy of God for His earthly people. Does this not also apply to we Gentiles who have been saved through the supreme sacrifice of the Lord Jesus upon the Cross?

## **Chapter 11**

Chapter 11 begins with a forest fire in Lebanon which has the lofty mountain range in Syria, a long time enemy of the Jews. Fire is the agent of destruction used upon the oppressors of Israel. The mighty cedars were Lebanon's glory. In colourful language, the fir trees are called upon to howl which word means to mourn and this would be in a loud voice. If the mighty cedars are consumed what chance has the humbler fir tree? And what of the oaks of Bashan in a rich tract of land east of Jordan between Mount Hermon in the north and Gilead in the south. Note in verse 10, Lebanon and Gilead are linked where the Lord says He will bring His people into the lands of Gilead and Lebanon. Bashan was the portion of the half-tribe of Manasseh and is now known as the Golan Heights. Isaiah 2. 13 speaks of the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up and all the oaks of Bashan but Zechariah states that they are to be spoiled. Once the vintage forest but soon to be a smouldering pile of ash but the oaks are felled as they provided wood for necessary domestic use such as oars for boats (Ezekiel 27. 5 ff.) The firestorm causes the shepherds great distress (verse 3) and the lions who sheltered under the shade of the tress from the heat of the day now flee and it would affect domestic livestock. The pride of Jordan is spoiled, all 65 miles of the Valley of Jordan just below the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. In verse 4 the Lord says, Feed the flock of the slaughter that is to say the

flocks destined for slaughter. The Jewish people were no strangers to persecution and destruction and in 70AD a million died at the hands of the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem.

The following verse talks about the nations who took possession of God's people and put them at a disadvantage and do not feel guilty or any pang of conscience and even the shepherds did not care about these slaves. E B Pusey refers to these shepherds as high priests, priests, scribes, lawyers, Pharisees and Sadducees who were corrupt and played into the hands of the enemy. As a result, the Lord will no longer have pity for His people and the land and allow the people to be delivered into the hands of these nations and their kings and the land will also suffer. Many believe this refers to the time when Messiah comes and the Holy Land when it is occupied by the Romans when the Jews rejected Christ the Messiah. As a consequence, Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70 by the Romans when the prophet describes the Jews as the poor of the flock rendered sometimes as the miserable flock. In verse 7, we read of the shepherds of the East who had two staves which could be called Beauty and Bands. Beauty stands for graciousness and favour and Bands speaks of connection and this foreshadows the Good Shepherd who will feed His flock. Three other shepherds or types of shepherds will be cut off and Dennett refers to these as Pharisees Sadducees and Herodians, religious heads of the people.

God's shepherd care for His earthly has been rejected and so God will not bother with them any more and this is often interpreted as being at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Beauty, the symbol of Divine protection, will be cut asunder and the Divine covenant with the Gentile nations will be broken as they were intent on destroying the Jews. However, in verse 14, God says He will cut asunder the other band, called Bands, which will break the brotherhood between Israel and Judah. This has been called the saddest prophecy regarding the Jews. Persecution by men is regrettable but abandonment by God is utter desolation.

Verse 11 further indicates the breaking of the covenant God had with the Gentiles which covenant lasted until they began their persecution of the Jews. A few of the Jewish flock still waited on the Lord and it has been said that there will always be a godly remnant.

The following verse is a reference to the betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver. One could ask, Is that all He was worth? In the UK, Christ and Christianity is despised and even Christians have services and worship over-tainted with the secular and worldly which has become trendy, modern and a social institution. We live in a society that only cares for the things of the world, not of Christ or of others. Who have we in politics that honours the Lord and is true to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints? The Labour party is largely made up of left wingers and atheists and some who hate the Jews. But the question should be asked of us, What think we of Christ? Is He really precious to us? Do we give Him the pre eminence? Graham Scroggie was right when he said, If He is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.

Verse 13 instructs that the silver be cast into the potter in the House of the Lord. Of course, this is an ironic statement and the throwing was to be in the most holy place, the Temple itself. Judas cast the silver pieces before the high priests before he killed himself in the potters' field.

The second staff, Bands, was to be cut asunder breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. These nations were destined for severance and this by a false and foolish shepherd (verse 15). These nations were disintegrated when Rehoboam, the son of wicked Solomon, forsook the counsel of the older men and the house of Judah separated from the house of Israel. As a consequence, Israel rebelled against the house of Judah (2 Chronicles 10.19).

The ignoring of the counsel of older men (2 Chronicles 10.13) has a significance today. Most modern Christians do not want the old ways, the traditional and proven paths but what is modern, 'with it' and 'cool.' The Bible teaches us to walk in the old ways.

God will raise up a foolish shepherd with all the accoutrements of a real shepherd and this He will do because the Good Shepherd has been rejected. This new shepherd will be careless and reckless who not only rejects his flock but is cruel to it. He will not heal the injured of the flock but uses the flock for his own benefit. The flock would suffer with torn claws because they are mercilessly overdriven.

Verse 17 produces woes upon this shepherd and describes him as an idol. Is he the Antichrist who will be destroyed by the brightness of the coming of the True Shepherd There is also the Lawless one who will be cast alive into the lake of fire (2 Thessalonians 2.8).

## **Chapter 12**

The burden concerning Israel says the Lord, who stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth and formed the spirit of man within him. All of this shows the power of God and that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He is also the creator of man and this denies science and evolution. Dr F A Tatford and many many others said, "I cannot believe in evolution because I am a scientist!"

The second verse refers to Jerusalem becoming a fearsome place as all the nations of the world war against this city led by the Antichrist who we encountered at the end of the previous chapter. Even today, we acknowledge the hatred of the Jews because they are God's people and this hate is building up as is the hatred towards Christians. There will be a siege of Jerusalem and this period is known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30.7). This is future, of course. Jerusalem will become as a burdensome stone, too heavy to hold and, as it slips from grasp, will result painful lacerations and injury. It all very well the powerful nations taking on Jerusalem, but it will be a greater task than expected.

This is the day of the Lord (verse 4). The horsemen will be smitten with madness and the horses astonished and confused. Of course, in these days to come, the means of transport will be mechanical and the riders will be soldiers, although one cannot rule out the use of horses. They and their riders will be rendered useless for battle since the curse will be upon Gentiles who rise up against God's people. Verse 5 refers to the Lord's support for Judah since they are His people. Even the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall trust in the strength of the Lord and with conviction.

Verse 6 speaks of the governors of Judah being like fire in a sheaf which will devour the enemies. Fire speaks of God's judgment upon the enemies of His people. The Lord shall save the dwellings of Judah, the glory of the Temple, and the glory of those who live in Jerusalem. The nations will not magnify themselves over Judah who will boast in the Lord and not in themselves.

It is a cause of consternation that many churches boast in themselves and in their leaders who lap it up. They have the attitude Look at me and consider what I have done, which is the antithesis of the Bible position, Look at Christ and see what He has done. The glory in self is absolutely forbidden in Scripture.

The future of Judah will be secure in accordance with the Lord's will and His deliverance. Even those weak with fear shall be strong like the warrior king David. All nations against Jerusalem will be destroyed (verse 9), and the people of God shall receive the spirit of grace in abundance and look upon the One whom they pierced and be in mourning for their sin against their Messiah, as one would be for their dead firstborn. It will not be a casual glance but a fixed look. How sad they will be, how mournful and yet how glad. The emotions will be great and, even as I say this, I can feel these sentiments. Today, we must fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus and no one and nothing else.

The Lord was wounded in the house of His friends. Do we do that? If we do not give Him the pre-eminence, are we wounding Him? If we are taken up with self, what we have done, and our entertainment Christianity with its pop music, worship hymns, dancing and social events, are we wounding Him?

Verse 11 speaks of the great mourning in Jerusalem as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo. Hadadrimmon is derived from Hadad and Rimmon, two Syrian gods. Megiddo was the place where the last and greatest king of Judah, Josiah, was fatally wounded by the army of Pharaoh Necho. Pusey writes that the death of Josiah was the last gleam of the sunset of Judah who faded in the blackness of night.

He will be mourned and, at the defeat of Antichrist, there will be national mourning by the Jews as to how they treated the Lord Jesus. Every family and every person will be devastated because of the crucifixion of the Son of God. Person by person will mourn and that, in itself, is repentance accompanied by genuine humility. We all need to be humble and, remember, humility is not underestimating self but forgetting self.

Make this poor self grow less and less  
And all things else recede  
My heart be daily nearer Thee  
From sin be daily freed.

### **Chapter 13**

Chapter 12 deals with national remorse of the Jews who were responsible for the crucifixion of the Messiah. Chapter 13 deals with the cleansing and refining of the nation of Israel after the defeat of the Antichrist.

Jehovah now restores Himself to His people. A fountain will be opened for all. It is probably a well with water and this is symbolic, of course.

Repentance is followed by cleansing and this repentance here is for the sin of judicial guilt and moral impurity.

The second verse speaks of the Lord destroying all idols and also of the exile of all false prophets and teachers and every unclean spirit or influence.

Even their names shall be banished. All demons, which are the products of Satan, will go. Parents of a false prophet shall berate him and thrust him through. False prophets must not live. Matthew 10 verses 34-36 speaks of foes within one's own household. Some false prophets will apparently be ashamed but will wear sackcloth but this will be to deceive. He may protest that he is not a prophet but a husbandman working with cattle or, in simple terms, a farm labourer and was brought up to be this.

While we have suggested that the Lord was wounded by His friends who inflicted wounds in His hands, false prophets in Israel would often mutilate their hands in order to procure answers from their gods.

Nonetheless, the message here is the condemnation of false prophets and the reminder of the Good Shepherd who was not only the Messiah but the Great Prophet. He is contrasted again with false shepherds who care not for their flock.

It may not be profitable to dwell on the subject of false prophets and false teachers today, but what is lamentable is that there are many variations of Christian teaching and the confusion it causes makes

unbelievers not wish to believe in the truth as there are some many lies and falsehoods in denominations as well as cults.

The reason for the Jews repentance and cleansing is because they smote the Good Shepherd and reference is made of the sword, the emblem of death. This quotation comes from Matthew 26.31. At the Last Supper, the Lord, with the agony of the Cross hours away, said that His disciples would be offended and stumbled that night and His flock would be scattered. One is reminded of Leviticus 26.33, And I will scatter you among the heathen and draw out a sword after you and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

Verse 7 appears strange where it says that the Lord will turn His hands upon the little ones. It does not speak of Divine cruelty but means that the Lord will keep His hands on the little ones. The Lord Jesus was kind and loving to children. He said, Suffer the children (little ones) to come unto Me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19.14).

These final verses also are in the days of Jacob's trouble, the Tribulation, of which the last three and half years which is the Great Tribulation as set out in Matthew 24.21. Two thirds of the land will be cut off but a third will be left. It should not be taken that two thirds of the population will die since this seems to refer to those in the land, and not the towns and cities, hence the word therein. The land is the location of the Antichrist, the Lawless One, before his defeat. The other third will be refined as gold and the Lord will embrace them as His people. These have been referred to as the godly remnant.

## **Chapter 14**

This chapter deals with the day of the Lord, an expression usually used to denote God's judgment upon the Antichrist when heathen nations shall gather against Jerusalem in battle. The invaders will divide the spoil among themselves and, after a siege, the city will be captured, the houses will be looted and the woman raped. Half of the population shall be taken into captivity but the rest shall remain in this awful plight. Antichrist, the Lawless One, will believe that he has the victory.

But then, the Lord intervenes (verse 3) who will fight for His people against the Gentile nations.

This is the second part of His Second Coming. The first, referred to as the rapture, is set out in 1 Thessalonians 4 when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a great shout and the voice as of a trumpet and all the dead believers and those believers alive at the time of His Coming shall be caught up into heaven and forever be with the Lord. These believers are called saints as does the apostle Paul in some of his epistles. Later, at the end of the Great Tribulation, the Lord will come to the earth physically and His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which shall split into a great valley. It will be terrifying experience and people will panic and run away as they did in the dreadful earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah.

It is important to note that His saints accompany Him. They are called an army in the corresponding passage in Revelation 19 at verse 14.

This day of the Lord will not be dark or light, not like day or night but, at evening time, it will be light. Antichrist and his armies will be defeated and a fountain of living waters shall flow from Jerusalem speaking of cleansing and purification. The destruction of the enemies of the Lord are detailed in Revelation 19 and later in this chapter.

Verse 9 speaks of the Lord being King over all the earth and setting up His millennial reign when Satan is bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20. 1).

In those days, the Lord will be the only Ruler and reign over all the earth from America to Australia, from Africa to China. The government will be His, not Republicans, Conservatives, Communists and other left wingers. Consider Isaiah 9. 7 and Philippians 2 where it states that every knee shall bow to the Lord and confess that He is Lord. All those who deny Him now, and have done, will realise how wrong they were and own up and confess that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God and as everyone is raised to stand before the Lord in judgment. How devastating it will be for atheists, idolaters, those into witchcraft and spiritualism, that is to say sorcery, murderers and liars and those who had added or subtracted for the Word of God (Revelation 22. 15 to 18). Surely, it behoves us all to keep true to the Word of God and not add to it or subtract from it and to beware of false teaching.

Those living in Jerusalem will now live in safety and Jerusalem will not be destroyed again.

Then in verse 12, we read of the plague or destruction of the enemies of God. They will be consumed and, while I am not being dogmatic, some have referred to their injuries as if caused by radiation. It will be a time of great tumult, neighbour against neighbour and Judah shall fight and take the spoils of wars. The victory will draw people to come to worship the Lord and those who do not honour the Lord shall suffer from the withdrawal of rain and the harvest. Egypt is singled out for punishment.

In those days, Holiness unto the Lord will be apparent everywhere, in every household, on every kitchen utensil and there will not be anymore threat of the Canaanite which I take to refer generally to any nation.

If there is one thing missing today in some churches, it is holiness, the respect, reverence and exclusive promotion of the Lord Jesus, as we have stated before. There is too much self on the throne whereas the Lord must be the only One on the throne of our hearts.

## MALACHI

Malachi's name means my messenger or my angel and most of the Church Fathers and early rabbis believe this book to be anonymous. Malachi is later than Haggai and Zechariah as the Temple had been rebuilt. He may have been a contemporary of Nehemiah and his prophecy could be dated not much before 450ABC.

His message is of God's love. The proof of His love was His choice of Jacob in His grace and even if Jacob's descendants were weak, Esau's descendants were much weaker. It seems harsh for God to say Esau have I hated and it must be remembered how Esau was treated. However, Esau became an idolater and fornicator and did not attempt to resolve the problems, or to honour God. The Lord had indignation for the descendants of Esau.

On another issue The love of God made Israel His choice, His firstborn and He expected and deserved the respect and reverence from His people, how could the priests and other Jews doubt the love of God? But they showed Him total disrespect bringing offering that were unworthy of the governor's table and of the Lord. Hence, the Lord's Table was polluted. Animals for the offerings were blind or blemished and the attitude was that anything would do for God. A son honours his father and a servant his master but where is the honour due to God? (verse 6). Does this attitude exist today? I am aware of those who worship God their way and not God's way, and, to put this into common parlance, 'anything will do and we will do it our way.'

Much modern worship is like this.

Even when some people beseeched God to be merciful towards them, the Lord replied that he had no pleasure in them (verses 9 and 10). Insincerity does not fool God.

The fact was that the Jews did not love God. The sacrifices were a drudge and chapter 1 verse 10 states it is far better to have no sacrifices at all. In verse 11, the dispersion of the Jews is highlighted. Some sacrifices were born of deceit and would invoke God's curse (verse 14) and the priests took no remedial action. In chapter 2, the unscrupulous priests are arraigned. Their example was appalling.

God speaks of His covenant with Levi (verse 4ff) which was of peace and fear in the sense of respect. They walked with God in equity but now the priests corrupted the law and caused many both to stumble and to fall because they did not keep the ways of the Lord.

Chapter 2, from verse 10, speaks of that which contradicts God's love in that men were divorcing their wives and marrying heathen women which were expressions of apostasy as shown in the life of Solomon. In addition, these badly treated women would not easily find another husband, and by now, monogamy was ideal. The Lord dislikes a husband putting away his wife. We read that the descendants of Jacob have been treacherous against everyone even his own brother. Often they feigned repentance (2. 13) but God is not fooled. The people wearied the Lord with their words. It is repentance and restoration that is needed.

Chapter 3 speaks of the Lord sending a messenger before Himself who is clearly John the Baptist who will prepare the way of the Lord. Who shall be able to stand before Him? He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers soap. He will judge sorcerers, adulterers, false accusers and those who oppress and cause distress to widows and orphans and those who disregard others. Verse 6 is important. The Lord does not change and there will be forgiveness available for the repentant people of Jacob's line as in former times.

In verse 7, the Lord pleads with His people to return to Him and He will return unto them and their sins and treachery will be forgiven. Many people dwell on the severity of God but forget His mercy

and eagerness to forgive. The Jews had withheld their tithes, robbed God in tithes and offerings and that is why they had become a curse but the end result is that God wants his people to prosper and all the nations to know that God is blessing them. The people had used strong words against the Lord and said that it was vain to serve God and they called the proud happy people. A book was written about those who did respect the Lord, or a record of them was made. The Lord says that in a day to come when the Lord will make up His jewels, these named true believers who respected the Lord will be spared. There follows a note of caution that we must discern between the righteous and the wicked, those who serve the Lord and those that do not.

Sadly, there are those who claim to belong to the Lord but are promoting themselves. The epistle of James reminds us that God resists the proud.

Chapter 4 speaks of the earth burning as an oven but this is a reference to the fire of judgment not a conflagration. The proud and the wicked will be severely punished because of their sins. But to those who fear the Lord, that is to say respect and honour Him, there will be healing from the Righteous One and these godly people will prosper and trample down the proud and wicked. There is always a call to repentance.

Elijah in the Old Testament was known both as the reformer and restorer and the one who prepared the way for the future. He is therefore likened to John the Baptist who was also to prepare the way but, as with Elijah, would the people receive and accept him? Elijah was forced into the wilderness by Ahab's evil wife Jezebel who was full of hatred. Eventually, John was hated after time in the wilderness. But this second Elijah would appear and the Lord Jesus said of him that no greater man was ever born.

There are lessons to be learned. We are to love the Lord and not doubt His love for us. We are to bring Him our best and not bring anything less. We are to worship Him as He instructs and our worship is not to follow any worldly methods. How we express ourselves, or want to express ourselves, is not the regulation for worship. Worship is worthship and what we bring to the Lord must be spiritual and not of this world. We are not to be proud and promote ourselves or others. There are Divine promises and blessings to those who are true to the Lord and this is why we follow Him as closely as we can. If he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all. What of our religious leaders of our day? Do priests and vicars faithfully preach the Gospel and put the Lord first?

The other great lesson is that Malachi is a book about morality. Is this preached in our churches or secular world, where, in the UK, only 2% go to church? Standards continue to drop.

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*NOTE These essays were written over a period of 30 years and so there is some repetition and the style of writing varies because of the time span.*

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